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**Crushed Pearls:
The Revival and Transformation of the Buddhist Nuns' Order in Taiwan**

by

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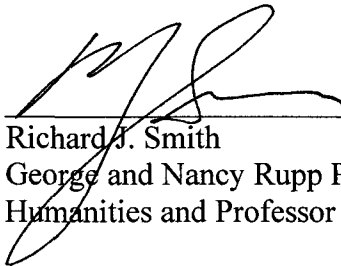
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ABSTRACT

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This dissertation examines the impacts of religious movements through a multi-layered study of the Buddhist renaissance that emerged in Taiwan in the 1980s. By examining this historically important development, I clarify the process by which movements transform social structures and the constraints that the movements encounter. This dissertation includes a recent history of rapid political liberalization and economic growth, the legalization of abortion and the expansion of women's rights, campaigns against human trafficking and prostitution, and the formation of the first lesbian group in Taiwan. I use two major research strategies: (1) a historical analysis of data and (2) a Hakka case study. Data have been collected from archives, interviews, newspapers, and published reports. This dissertation challenges the argument that movements are inconsequential, and that the courts, economic elites, or political parties are the main propelling agents causing institutional change. In general, these groups respond to the demands of movements, particularly the leverage brought to bear by feminist and religious movements. The Buddhist renaissance movement in Taiwan attempted to re-establish the broken lineages of nuns to confront challenges of inequality and injustice. By pressing for changes in traditions, the Buddhist movement has improved the Taiwanese legal culture and system, as well as the status of women in Taiwan.

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CONTENTS

Acknowledgments iii

1. Introduction

Progressive and Religious: How Nuns in Taiwan Are Transforming Buddhism	1
Buddhism and Gender	7
Goddesses versus Real Women	8
Women and Broken Lineages	13
Defying Established Systems	14
Special Responsibility to Achieve Gender Equity	18

2. Is Buddhism Inherently Sexist? 20

Shakyamuni's Sexist View	21
The Inconsistencies in Sexual Transformation	30
The Problem with Sex	40
Essentialism versus Constructivism	48
Economic Realities	53
Buddhist Violence Against Women	57
Social Necessity to Restore the Nuns' Order	61

3. Chinese Buddhism: The Synthesis of Past and Present 66

The Onset of Religious Daoism	67
The Common Practice of Popular Religion	68
Major Religious Texts, Interpretations and Rituals	70
The Rituals of Ancestor Worship	73
The Impositions of Proscriptions	82
The Impact of Social Changes	93
Taiwan's Revolt Against the "Backwardness of China"	95

4. Buddhist Renaissance in Taiwan 106

History of Buddhism in Taiwan	111
Modernizing and Popularizing the Buddhist Image	120
Lu Xui Lian and the Critics Against Confucian Traditions	121
Universalism and Personalization	129
Women in Chinese Buddhist Schools	139
Confucius's Impact on Buddhism in China	150
The Impact of Philosophical Daoism	151

5. The Hakka: Why Most Hakka Embrace Buddhism and Syncretism	154
Migratory Outcasts with a Pioneering Spirit	158
The Mystery of Their Ethnic Evolution	159
Theories of Hakka Origins	173
The Waves of the Hakka Diaspora	184
The Hakka–Korean Link	197
The Compatibility of Buddhism and Hakka Adaptation and Transformation	206
6. The Monastic Practices of Hakka Buddhist Nuns in Meinong Village	213
Polite Resistance to Christian Missionaries	214
The Daily Practices of Hakka Buddhist Nuns	215
The Hakka Buddhist Community and the Preservation of Mahayana Buddhism	218
Hakka Buddhist Nuns as Active Actors	223
Hakka Buddhist Nuns as a Feminist Movement	226
Religious Symbols	228
Structure of the Nuns' Order	230
New Opportunities for Education	234
Social and Economic Conditions	237
7. Conclusion	
Realities and Innovators of the Mahayana Tradition	239
Taiwan's Feminist Movement and Western Feminism	240
Sacrifice and Strategy	242
Economic Growth and Political Liberalization	245
Buddhist Nuns, the "Hakka Card," and Government Decisions	248
The Revitalization of the Nuns' Order as a Necessity to Right Action	251
Notes	253
Bibliography	279

INTRODUCTION

Progressive and Religious:

How Nuns in Taiwan Are Transforming Buddhism

In Buddhism's 2,500-year history, Buddhist nuns and laywomen's voices, achievements, and stories have been overshadowed by those of their male counterparts. More recently, however, new generations of scholars and practitioners have begun focusing on the previously neglected contributions of Buddhist women in order to advocate new gender equity.

This dissertation expands the purview of Chinese Buddhist studies by presenting historical evidence and providing new data through textual analyses and interviews that advance critical interpretation of the meaning and significance of female monastic practice. The study contributes to Hakka studies, Chinese studies, and religious studies because I highlight important moments of Chinese history that help explain why Buddhist nuns in Taiwan, particularly Hakka Buddhist nuns, are becoming so prominent today. The materials I present elucidate the activities of the nuns fighting for and gaining opportunities in this century. They also shed light upon how nuns in Taiwan practice Buddhism in the contemporary era. Changes in Chinese religiosity as Taiwan rapidly moved from a traditional society with a rich cultural heritage to an affluent, modernized lifestyle are also considered.

I investigate developments in this century in terms of the features that are unique to monastic women. I attempt to present the Hakka nuns' perspective on their history, that is, their own interpretation of their lives and practices. Hakka women in Meinong have chosen a Buddhist monastic lifestyle, complete with celibacy vows and the pursuit

of compassion, wisdom, and enlightenment. The structure of their lives is regulated by Chinese Buddhist monastic practices. In addition to exploring their lives as an example of human religiosity, this work also addresses concerns found in historiography, Chinese studies, women's studies, and ethnographic studies. As an Asian American with a Hakka background who has lived in Taiwan, the United States, and Central America and was raised in a family where my mother is a Baptist and my father considers himself Buddhist, I offer a perspective that is unique, but certainly not universal or neutral.

This text will examine the history of Buddhism in Taiwan and its recent Buddhist renaissance. Buddhism was introduced into Taiwan by pioneers from Fujian and Guandong provinces during the end of the Ming dynasty. Buddhist practices were deterred by the Dutch colonial rulers who controlled Taiwan from 1624 until 1663. The “free” practice of Buddhism began under Ming dynasty rule after Zheng Chenggong defeated the Dutch from Taiwan in 1663. Zheng Chenggong's son, Zheng Jing, founded the first Buddhist temple in Taiwan, which gained rapid popularity.¹

After the defeat of Zheng Jing's son, Jing Ning, in 1683, the Jing dynasty controlled Taiwan. From 1683 to 1895, under Jing rule, numerous monks migrated to Taiwan from Fujian and Guandong provinces to set up temples, and introduced the various Buddhist branches.² Japanese Buddhism influenced Taiwan from 1895 to 1945 due to the Japanese occupation. This impact influenced the practices performed by local Buddhists. Some leaders even married and gave up their vegetarian lifestyles. (Buddhist purists prohibit both of these practices.) Monks and nuns stopped shaving their heads, and Buddhist temples were frequently extravagantly bejeweled with mystic or Daoist decor. Temples also began incorporating non-Buddhist deities, such as Matsu, goddess

of the sea, and Du Di Gong, the earth god, both of whom were worshipped as equals to Buddha.

In 1945, Taiwan was re-established as Republic of China, and Buddhist teachers from the mainland tried to “purify” the religious practice by urging disciples to practice vegetarianism, celibacy, and head shaving by establishing organizations such as the Taiwan Buddhist Association (founded in 1945).³

Since the mid-1980s, Taiwan has experienced a religious revival both within the traditional popular religious sphere and within institutionalized Buddhism. This momentous cultural phenomenon, which was overshadowed by worldwide scholarly and media interest in Taiwan’s economic and political developments, warrants attention in its own right. An outstanding feature of Taiwan’s religious resurgence is the unprecedented increase in the number of Buddhist nuns. The current population of fully ordained nuns and monks is approximately thirty thousand. Scholars of monastic Buddhism in Taiwan estimate that nuns comprise approximately 75 percent of this monastic population. This figure is based on fieldwork observations and by estimating annual ordination records. It must be noted that it is an exceptionally difficult undertaking to collect and confirm data regarding Taiwan’s Buddhist monastics and their communities and activities, particularly for the years after 1986, the year martial law ended.⁴ Overall in Taiwan there is a recent Buddhist population growth, although the Buddhist monastic population has historically had an overwhelmingly large female population. According to the Interior Ministry, Taiwan’s Buddhist population increased from 800,000 in 1983 to 4.9 million in 1995. During this period, registered Buddhist temples grew from 1,157 to 4,020. In 1995 there were 9,300 monks and nuns, in comparison to 3,470 in 1983.⁵

In 2005, government statistics indicated the Buddhist population in Taiwan was 8 million (total population was 23 million). The Daoist population was about equal at approximately 7.8 million. Many of these practitioners also participate in popular religious or folk practices without divorcing themselves from their primary religious affiliation. In fact, more than 90 percent of the people in Taiwan practice folk religion, which is an integration of Buddhist, Daoist, and Confucian elements. Approximately 7 to 15 percent of the Taiwanese population considers themselves strictly Buddhists.⁶ One characteristic these strict Buddhists would use to identify themselves is vegetarianism, which to them makes their Buddhism a “pure” form. Some people incorporate Buddhist elements into their lives and may consider themselves Buddhist, but the major Chinese religions, even Buddhism, are syncretic in Taiwan. For example, local faiths such as Yiguan Dao focus on Buddhist figures such as Guan Yin and Maitreya and promote vegetarianism, as does Buddhism. As a result, most people in Taiwan are syncretists even if they are not consciously aware of it.

Taiwan has become the heartland of the Mahayana monastic world because of its welcoming environment that encourages progress and the development of Buddhist doctrine, practice, and independent monastic communities. What is fascinating is that Taiwan has become a center for female Buddhist novices, both Asian and non-Asian, from all Buddhist traditions to obtain training and full ordination. These opportunities are not offered elsewhere because of the male monastic opposition over the centuries. Female monastics of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition are widely known as Buddhist nuns even though in actuality most are “novices” and not fully ordained nuns. They do not have the opportunity to be ordained in their tradition. They may, in fact, practice as

novices for their whole lives, especially if their lamas do not allow them to become ordained in the Chinese monastic tradition.

Institutionalized Buddhism in Taiwan continues to impact and strengthen world Buddhism; however, this Buddhist renaissance, inspired by the mission to create a “pure land on earth” through its prominent contributions to charitable and philanthropic causes, secular and spiritual education, publishing, mass media, the arts, environmentalism, opposition to nuclear power, animal rights, and disaster relief. Buddhists in Taiwan also plays a crucial role in the construction of a civil society in post-authoritarian Taiwan. The prevalence of women, both monastic and lay, in these developments is a result of the liberalization of traditional gender roles in Taiwan since the 1970s and a push that is creating more diverse life opportunities and choices for women. Nonetheless, whether and how the phenomenon of Taiwan’s Buddhist nuns can be explained through the categories and theories of “feminism” is a complex enterprise, which will be further examined in this dissertation.⁷

This work also showcases a case study of Hakka nuns in Meinong village who have chosen a Buddhist monastic lifestyle complete with celibacy vows and the pursuit of compassion, wisdom, and enlightenment. In Gaoxiong County, south of Taiwan, Meinong rests in a valley recessed into the foothills and is a vital center of Taiwan's Hakka community. The importance of Hakka heritage is reflected in the numerous cultural centers, shops, and other attractions that celebrate and draw on the long history of Taiwan’s largest ethnic minority. Approximately 10 to 15 percent of people in Taiwan consider themselves as Hakka, but of Meinong's 50,000 residents, almost 90 percent are Hakka and speak the Hakka dialect. Their ancestors settled in Meinong because of the

availability of fertile land. They immigrated into the region during the first year of the reign of Qianlong, the Qing dynasty emperor who ruled China from 1736 to 1796.⁸

The structure of the Hakka nuns' lives in Meinong is regulated by Chinese Buddhist monastic practices. Their daily lives involve getting up predawn, performing meditation practices, chanting, cleaning, and cooking. I will explore what Hakka nuns consider important as Buddhists. Close examination of a group of nuns within Meinong is the main focus of this work. This explication of that aspect of Taiwanese Buddhist history helps bring to light the efforts of this group of Hakka nuns in their struggle to live meaningfully in situations they wish to modify. Although Buddhist nuns in Taiwan are making significant progress towards Buddhist equality in actual practice but it has been a struggle to help nuns in areas such as Thailand. Blatant inequalities are still found in Buddhist communities, including the greater opportunities, status, and support monks experience.

The challenges Buddhist nuns face and the need for androgynization to combat gender discrimination will also be examined. Buddhist nuns have made significant contributions to Chinese and Buddhist histories. However, in the past two millennia, Buddhist women's stories have rarely been told and their contributions have been wrongfully neglected in comparison to their male counterparts. Men's achievements have dominated the Buddhist accounts of practice and scholarship and their power has produced a biased Buddhist history that values men and eclipses the central roles women played in the establishment of Buddhism in China in the sixth century, in Buddhist history as a whole, and as active participants during more recent years.

In the past two decades, vital changes within Buddhism have been influenced by feminist perspectives. With the advancement of modern technology and the growing popularity of Buddhism worldwide, Buddhism has been undergoing criticism and analysis of its practices and thoughts, including a range of social issues. Buddhist institutions could no longer ignore Buddhist women's contemporary and historical experiences due to the criticisms from those outside of Buddhist traditions and the Buddhist nuns' stand for equal opportunities. This international attention has spurred conferences to evaluate Buddhism's treatment of gender, particularly the treatment of nuns. These events resulted in the public support of leaders in Buddhist communities, including His Holiness the Dalai Lama, for the full ordination of women. Although there continues to be opposition and setbacks to achieving gender equality within Buddhist communities, which will be further discussed, the international Buddhist women's movement is committed to bringing about the social conditions that its participants feel correspond with Buddhist ideology.

Buddhism and Gender

Some generalizations regarding gender are conspicuous in Buddhism's history. First, monasticism is held in high importance, with the possible exceptions of Japanese Buddhists and recently converted western Buddhists. In ancient India during Buddha's lifetime, the householder lifestyle was customarily viewed as too demanding and distracting to enable a man to make any substantial progress toward a deep understanding of reality and the subsequent peace produced by such knowledge. The Buddha himself abandoned his family, social position, and wealth for a life of religious seeking. He

ordained numerous followers as nuns and monks during his lifetime. Since monasticism is central in Buddhist life, the existence or extinction of the nuns' order is a vital gender issue in Buddhism. Many Buddhist sources indicate the Buddha was hesitant to initiate a nuns' order, but it was established and has survived in some parts of the world. The restoration of the ordination of nuns continues to be a significant and often contentious issue.

Secondly, there are two severely opposing views regarding gender, particularly concerning the place of female rebirth in the Buddhist world. One perspective views gender as irrelevant because both women and men can attain the true nature of an enlightened mind, which is the same regardless of gender. The other position, considered more conservative, argues gender matters and a male rebirth is much more favorable due to the social privileges of being reborn a man. Monks always have held a greater social status than nuns and have had many more opportunities. Buddhism's major institutions, including the nuns' order, have always been male dominated, and only in modern times has this slowly been changing. Contemporary reformers have highlighted that these two traditional views regarding gender clash because if gender does not matter then there is little basis for giving men social privilege and domination of Buddhist institutions.⁹

Goddesses versus Real Women

An important concern in ancient Buddhism, the Buddhism of Buddha's day and the next three to five hundred years, was whether its fundamental perspective was misogynistic, meaning it had a hatred and fear of females and anything female-related. Monks had the propensity to create literature warning monks about the dangers of contact

with women. Many argue that these passages serve as evidence that early Buddhism held glaringly harmful views of women.¹⁰ Other commentators uphold that these observations do not comprise the entire story. They argue these passages regarding the dangers of women are actually about the weakness of men's discipline rather than about the inherent inferiority of women.¹¹

The majority of early Buddhist stories also indicate Buddha's initial rejection of the ordination of nuns in addition to the establishment of the eight special rules that place all nuns subordinate to all monks, even a monk who has only recently been ordained. Numerous accounts also stress the prediction that the Buddhist religion would only endure half as long as it otherwise would have because women had been allowed into the order. Scholars who have conducted textual analysis on these texts, however, have questioned the origin of these stories. Some scholars argue that the passages most probably were produced hundreds of years after Buddha's lifetime, when Buddhism was separating into conflicting groups.

The origins of Mahayana Buddhism continue to be debated, but most concede that it was present about five hundred years after Buddha's time. It is frequently argued that Mahayana Buddhism was more inclusive of laypeople and women than other forms of Buddhism found in India at that time; however, there is little evidence for this concept in Buddhist institutional practices of that period. Mahayana literature does offer unique roles for laypeople, however, and more specifically for women. We often find women as heroes of Mahayana texts, which describe them as far more knowledgeable than their male opponents, who symbolize the more established schools of Buddhism. Moreover,

these texts that portray women as knowledgeable heroes are not trivial, insignificant texts, but are among the most popular and influential.

The portrayals of empowered women range from those in which the woman transforms her female body into a male body as a sign of her higher knowledge to ones where she teaches and no one can challenge her. One of the most popular examples in which a female changes herself into a male is in the *Lotus Sutra*, an Indian passage that is held in high importance, particularly in East Asian Buddhism. The eight-year-old daughter of the Naga king is the heroine of the story. She is an unusual figure for high spiritual realization due to both her age and gender. Manjusri, an influential bodhisattva in the Mahayana pantheon, defends her, and she asserts she will teach the dharma. Sariputra, a prominent elder and disciple of the Buddha in the literature of older forms of Buddhism, contends that a female could not possibly have the ability to teach. Her “female organ disappeared and the male organ became visible” after a debate with Sariputra.

This story has been interpreted by numerous scholars. Conservative commentators assert this passage reveals women cannot become enlightened and must change into men before they can achieve enlightenment. They argue all women must transform into a man to reach enlightenment if even the Naga princess must change into a male form. The advocates of this view contend that “deserving women” will be reborn as men. For most women, of course, this sex change will not happen until a future life, but this potential, they argue, provides evidence that Buddhism does not practice gender discrimination. However, recent feminist scholars on this passage, me included, would argue that the problem in this passage is not the Naga princess’s femaleness, but Sariputra’s ignorance.

He is so ideologically fixated that it takes a physical sex transformation to convince him of true dharma. He failed to recognize true dharma simply because it was coming out of a girl's mouth. The Naga princess's ability to magically transform her physical form as a final, extreme method of making evident to him what should have been obvious to him further supports her superior understanding, both of true dharma and of the ignorance of some men. Buddhist stories habitually incorporate the motif of magical powers ensuing from great meditative realizations, but only highly regarded figures can achieve such extraordinary acts.

Along similar lines, a popular example of the empowerment of the female in Buddhist literature takes place in the *Vimalakirti Nirdeśa Sūtra*. Sariputra is debating with a goddess who had been studying for twelve years in Vimalakirti's palace. Sariputra is in awe of her knowledge and erudition. He declares that someone who knows as much as she does should be a man, and then challenges her to transform herself into a man. She responds that she had been searching for the innate characteristics of the female sex for twelve years without success. As a result, there was nothing to be transformed. Sariputra continues to insist on the transformation so all of a sudden she changes him into a woman and herself into a man. Now in a male physical form, the goddess raises the question to Sariputra, now in female form, if she (he) has attained the essential nature of his newly female sex. A disorientated Sariputra retorts that he does not even understand how he transformed into a woman. Suddenly the goddess changes Sariputra back into a man and herself back into a woman and asks Sariputra about the "female form and innate characteristics." Learning from this experience, the now wiser Sariputra responds, "The

female form and innate characteristics neither exist nor do not exist," a response much more in agreement with Mahayana teachings on emptiness.

Mahayana texts also depict women teaching the dharma, but unlike the previous cases there is no sex transformation. The women defeat the men solely based on logic. The women argue that emptiness of any essence is the only trait common to all things and no particular trait has true existence. Thus, femaleness and maleness are merely manifestations. In one passage, a male elder challenges Jewel Brocade and argues that a woman's body cannot achieve supreme enlightenment. She replies that if perfect enlightenment cannot be realized in a female body, then it cannot be realized in a male physical form either. She further explains that enlightenment is neither female nor male, and emptiness is also neither female nor male. The story closes with a reminder: "the dharma is neither male nor female."

Although Buddhist texts empower goddess-like women, rarely does this power and elevated status translate into the actual lives of Buddhist women. In a later chapter, I will discuss why this is usually the case. In most of the world, the ordination lineages of nuns have disappeared. They have, however, survived in Taiwan, one of the most significant sites for the development of Mahayana ideology and literature. Although some Buddhist women founded nunneries or impacted politics and religion, overall androcentrism and misogyny persist in the Mahayana monastic world. We can locate some texts recording the lives of nuns in East Asia, but these collections are minimal in comparison to the numerous texts recording the lives of monks and texts written specifically only for men.

Women and Broken Lineages

In the third century BCE, Emperor Asoka of India led missionary efforts that began the spread of Buddhism to Sri Lanka. Stories tell us that Asoka's daughter established the nuns' order in Sri Lanka, and it was Sri Lankan nuns who went to China in the fifth century CE to initiate the nuns' order there. These Chinese nuns' ordination lineages are the root of most lineages for nuns' ordination in the modern world. However, after the eleventh century CE, Sri Lankan Buddhism saw the extinction of the nuns' order. Buddhist scholarship indicates the ordination of nuns never occurred on Southeast Asian lands.

In the modern Theravada world, reviving nuns' ordination is a fervently challenged problem. Conservatives contend that the Buddha did not want to ordain nuns in the first place and that the nuns' order can be revived only by the next Buddha, whose arrival is not in the near future. As a result, this extinction has forced women from Theravada countries to receive ordination from Chinese and Korean lineages in Taiwan and return to their Southeast Asian homes as fully ordained nuns. Once back in their homeland, the nuns confront great hostility, particularly in countries such as Thailand. The monks and laypeople usually shun their fully ordained status and view them as traitors. Nonetheless, nunneries slowly are being re-established in Theravada countries. In 1998 the first ordination of nuns in a Theravada country in over a thousand years finally took place in Sri Lanka with the help of nuns ordained in Taiwan.

Defying Established Systems

The Buddhist idea of impermanence maintains that all sentient beings have equal potential for enlightenment. The Buddha educated his followers to employ logical reasoning to test his teachings. Based on this logic and reasoning, Buddhist teachings should be inclusive, meaning equally accessible to both women and men. Therefore, it is the duty of Buddhist practitioners and scholars to question the inequalities and discrimination women have confronted for centuries and to endeavor to eradicate any unfairness women deal with today.

Disadvantaged societal groups may place themselves at risk by pointing out injustices, however. Women who are bold and speak out for equality are often viewed negatively, including in Asian countries today, even in more liberal areas such as Taiwan. They are often criticized and viewed as useless. Asian countries often highly admire characteristics such as humility and meekness. It is not only men who criticize outspoken women, but also other women who disparage these brave individuals. Although Taiwan is much more progressive than most regions in Asia, many women, even the ones who may appear more liberal, feel they must play a certain domestic role to maintain social harmony.

Giving women a place to think and speak, and to know they should think and speak, and providing an opportunity for women's education are essential. As a little girl growing up in Taiwan before the peak of the Taiwanese feminist and Buddhist movements, I recall my extended families favoring my two male cousins. Even my father felt compelled to support his older brother's son and provide him with more opportunities than me for the success of his family line. Fortunately, my mother, an

educated outcast because she was an orphan, was progressive for her time and started her own company in the United States to provide me with better educational opportunities. We will never make any progress towards justice if only men have access to all the support and opportunities. Educationally disadvantaged women do not possess the tools to fight for equality. In many developing countries, Buddhist women cannot receive an education; therefore, we must first insist that where young boys have educational opportunities, young girls should have the same opportunities. As these young boys and girls view each other as peers and equals, girls will grow into confident and intelligent women and feel comfortable expressing their hopes and views.

Equal opportunities for economic development, education, and ordination will consequently lead to positive changes for women, including changes in Buddhist institution. Buddhism advocates the use of logic and reason to debate Buddhist philosophy and these same skills can be used to encourage social justice. When nuns are told the eight special rules place all nuns under monks, regardless of the years they have been a part of the monastic community, nuns can argue by questioning why these eight special rules are applied only to women if maleness and femaleness are only appearances. Similarly, they should respond to the requirement that monks must be present at the nuns' ordinations by asking why nuns are not present at the ordination of monks if all sentient beings have equal access to enlightenment. If all sentient beings possess equal potential to achieve enlightenment and gender is irrelevant, then why do the nuns need monks to be present at their ordination at all? Or rather, why are nuns not present at monks' ordinations? The nuns can also argue that the survival of the nuns' lineages is just as important as the survival of the monks' order in spreading the teachings of Buddhism.

Furthermore, the nuns are told there are only ten precepts for women and they can counter by questioning why ten precepts are not enough for monks. They can reason that if anything is meritorious for monks, then it must be similarly meritorious for nuns; therefore, based on Buddhist teachings, young girls, laywomen, and nuns deserve equal access to all the opportunities that are given to boys and men. These debates and discussions based on logic and reason will encourage nuns, monks, and laypeople to think about women's abilities and the discrimination they have faced for thousands of years.

Direct confrontation as a method of rectifying social situations, such as gender imbalance, is still viewed negatively in Asian societies. Many Buddhist practitioners and scholars will advocate that the most effective tactic is to ask questions respectfully to slowly open up the environment for inquiry. Then gradually they should explain why women should have equal opportunities for education and economic support. They argue that those who engage in dialogue are quick to recognize that Buddhist practices beneficial for men are equally beneficial to women and consequently they should have equal access to them. I propose that for these discussions to have a serious impact, they must be led by major Buddhist figures who are recognized by both the Buddhist community and the public. Their differing views are irrelevant as long as they share the same objective of pursuing equality for women. These Buddhist practitioners and scholars should come from around the world, particularly from countries where women are viewed as equals or nearly so. They also should record these meetings and make them public, such as on the Internet, for the world to access. Discussions behind closed doors will rarely produce any quick progress toward equal opportunities for women.

Regardless of the particular tactic we feel would be the best approach, all Buddhist practitioners and scholars should support the engagement of constructive dialogue to reach a deeper level of understanding through the use of logical reasoning and common sense. Burmese, Cambodian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Thai, Tibetan, and Vietnamese monks, nuns, and laypeople all confront discrimination and/or gender injustice in varying degrees. Debates and discussions educate us about Buddhist discipline and philosophy and how Buddhism can be adapted and applied in modern society. These discussions can lead to a greater understanding of why it is important for women to have equal access within their tradition and how we should go about creating these equal opportunities for them. Further, these debates and discussions bring an overall greater awareness and tolerance of Buddhism's teachings, both within the tradition and to the larger public.

From my perspective, some Buddhist cultures must change their attitudes to uphold Buddhist teachings and practices. Consciousness and true dharma have no gender, so placing women in subordinate positions to monks is clear discrimination produced most probably by monks' own insecurities and laypeople's preferences. The Buddha also acknowledged women have the potential to attain enlightenment like men. Again, the discrimination towards women conflicts with the fundamental Buddhist principle. Buddhists advocate compassion for all sentient beings, and if they are true to their stated principle then they must espouse gender justice.

Special Responsibility to Achieve Gender Equity

If our societies want to move towards real, lasting peace, we must take steps to ensure gender justice and social justice for all human beings. On the surface, Buddhist societies may seem more peaceful and less violent than other religious groups. Nonetheless, Buddhism's social structures are patriarchal; they may have many female goddesses, but real, living women usually do not have equal opportunities. This peaceful veneer has been an effective tactic in keeping the discriminatory Buddhist practices out of the minds of those both inside and outside of Buddhist societies. However, left alone, these underlying hypocrisies and tensions are like a silent illness that creates damage. Peace and understanding in any "family" requires effort and compromise, and in Buddhism the women have been doing most of the compromising. The majority of Buddhist women's contributions have not been recognized and their voices have frequently disappeared into oblivion. As long as women are discriminated against and do not have equal opportunities, Buddhists continue to accept hypocrisy or act hypocritically.

All Buddhists need to take responsibility for achieving gender justice in Buddhism. Monks and nuns hold a special responsibility because of their expressed commitment to the teachings of the Buddha. Monks, in particular, hold an even greater responsibility to work towards gender equity because they hold positions of greater influence. Regrettably, many monks do not believe that working toward equality is their responsibility. In fact, some monks are quite content with the current social structures.

The connections of Hakka identity, feminism, political and social engagement, and Buddhism underscore the importance of networks (*guanxi wang*) in Chinese society,

past and present.¹² The existence of these networks are important because Hakka identity is a powerful conduit through which political, social and other kinds of “energies” pass in Taiwan. Hakka Buddhist nuns and feminists are active agents in preserving and transforming societies through political and social engagement.

Western feminism has undeniably caused this social awareness and engagement. From my perspective, both insiders and outsiders contribute to the increased status of Mahayana Buddhist nuns. Insiders, as in the case of the Buddhist nuns in Taiwan, need to stand up and voice their recognition that gender equality is necessary. They must want equal opportunities and share their experiences of gender discrimination with each other and with outsiders. Outsiders, such as Buddhist scholars who are not Buddhist practitioners and the media at large, make the current conditions of Buddhist nuns known by bringing about public awareness of gender discrimination.

The story of the nuns in Taiwan is often considered the ultimate success story of Buddhist women. Nuns from around the world who face adversity in their homeland travel to Taiwan to become ordained to optimize the survival of the nuns’ lineages. The stories of Buddhist women deserve to be told and not be lost forever. As Buddhist practitioners and scholars, we should feel a special responsibility to promote peace, compassion, and justice for all living beings. It is necessary for the Buddhist movement to press for change to improve the legal culture and system, the status of women, and the survival of Buddhism.

CHAPTER 2

Is Buddhism Inherently Sexist?

Although the nuns in Taiwan have made significant strides in mending their broken lineage, the history and the very foundation of Buddhism remain obstacles and have slowed down the progress towards equality. One must understand the history of Buddhism through textual evidence to not only recognize the challenges women face, but also gain a greater appreciation for what they have achieved. Yeshe Tsogyal, one of the most famous women in Buddhist history, describes how women are treated in her Buddhist society:

I am a woman—I have little power to resist danger.

Because of my inferior birth, everyone attacks me.

If I go as a beggar, dogs attack me.

If I have wealth and food, bandits attack me.

If I do a great deal, the locals attack me.

If anything goes wrong, they all attack me.

Whatever I do, I have no chance for happiness.

Because I am a woman, it is hard to follow the Dharma.

It is hard even to stay alive.¹

Yeshe Tsogyal's description reflects the many challenges women face in Buddhist societies, and her words indicate she feels she is in a no-win situation. Not unlike most of the world's major religions, a largely patriarchal context plays in the founding of Buddhism. Mary Daly stated in *Beyond God the Father* that "if God is male, then male is God." Unfortunately, even when God is female, male is still God in most societies,

including most of those that practice Buddhism. The majority of the Buddhist sacred texts, doctrines, and rituals reflect this sexism towards women.²

The subordination of women has persisted as a significant feature of Chinese history, and the idea that women can only be “followers” continues to exist in Mahayana Buddhism. As a result, Buddhism can be viewed as patriarchal and misogynistic due to its interaction with the patriarchal culture from which it was founded and the patriarchal cultures to which it spread. Thus, although the basic teachings of the Buddha may not be inherently sexist, women face numerous obstacles in these male-dominated social systems, which I will further discuss in this chapter.

Shakyamuni’s Sexist View

Since its founding, Buddhism has discriminated against women. Scholars continuously debate about when the misogyny and patriarchy originated, but the legends surrounding Shakyamuni Buddha reveal Shakyamuni could be to blame for the origination of the discrimination and the obstacles nuns faced and continue to tackle in modern times. Shakyamuni lived in approximately 500 BCE in northern India. He began teaching the dharma in sixth century BCE. At age thirty-five he achieved enlightenment after enduring a period of asceticism.

The social system at that time was the caste system. Women, regardless of the caste they belonged to, did not hold equal status to men. According to the legend of the origin of the nuns in the *Tripitaka*, Shakyamuni Buddha’s aunt, Mahaprajapati, is said to be the first Buddhist nun. Mahaprajapati raised Shakyamuni after his mother, Maya, died. In Buddhist legends, Maya was Buddha’s mother and she was killed off

immediately after Shakyamuni was born to preserve her sexual purity.³ When Mahaprajapati asked Shakyamuni if she could join the Sangha and become one of his disciples, his immediate response was no because women had a mental inferiority and did not have the ability to comprehend and practice some of the Buddhist teachings. The BCA Dharma School textbook states that ancient India viewed “woman’s place is in the home and she can be a good Buddhist there,” which places a space limitation on women.

Shakyamuni, a young prince, was raised in a society where women were viewed as objects and subordinate to men. Women’s roles were to nurture and please men in a masculine society. As in traditional Chinese culture, whether they were a wife, mother, courtesan, or prostitute, their job was to serve men. In fact, in *Women in Theravada Buddhism*, Karen Andrews describes the purpose and status of women’s lives, which unfortunately many cultures today still echo:

Once married, women were supposed to obey their husband and his parents. Wives cooked, cleaned, bore and raised children, and looked after the servants. Women ate only what was left after the men had finished eating. If a husband was displeased with his wife, he could beat her or throw her out of the house. Divorce could be initiated by the husband, but not the wife. Women were supposed to bear children for their husbands. If no children were forthcoming, the husband would often take another wife. Adulterous wives were punished with death, while adulterous husbands would often take another wife. There were instances in which husbands would give wives away to other men. Women were lowered nearly to the point of being mere chattel.⁴

Modern standards may view a woman whose looks are close to perfection as a highly desirable wife, but in Shakyamuni’s world, a “perfect” woman would not be able to marry at all. She would be required by law, as stated in the *Vaisali*, to be a courtesan and be available for the pleasures of all men. These women’s place in society gave them

power in terms of self-sufficiency and an opportunity to master music and dance, but they also held dangerous positions where many were victims of rape and murder.

If a woman was not appealing enough to become a man's wife or a courtesan, the only remaining role was to become a servant or slave with a master. The masters were harsh and worked them sometimes to death. In this system they were under the master's complete control and could not refuse them under any circumstances. It was permitted under law for a master to kill his servant. In many cases the women were raped, beaten to death, or treated so poorly that they committed suicide. Janice Willis clearly sums up the status of women in Shakyamuni's world, "They were helpmates at best, but always they were viewed as being inferior, second class citizen."⁵

Many Buddhist proponents and scholars argue that Shakyamuni's cultural conditioning allowed him to hold only a misogynistic perspective on Buddha's life. However, another man living in Shakyamuni's time, his own cousin, Ananda, was capable of looking beyond women's traditional roles in ancient India. Shakyamuni allowed Mahaprajapati to join the Sangha only after Buddha's cousin and attendant, Ananda, urged him to allow women to join. When Mahaprajapati first asked Ananda if she could join he admonished her for her idea. Mahaprajapati was determined, however, and she and a large group of women marched barefoot to Vesali with their heads shaved and dressed as nuns. When they arrived at Shakyamuni's door their feet were swollen. Ananda said to Shakyamuni: "Give women a chance; we cannot say for sure that they will fail unless they have a chance to study and follow the Dharma." Ananda's statement reflects his awareness of continual change and indicates we should not be stuck on

present earthly perceptions. Even after Ananda's initial negotiation on the women's behalf, however, Shakyamuni refused to ordain the women.

Shakyamuni eventually caved in to Ananda's urgings and continued pressure, but then immediately established the Eight Heavy Duties (Garudhammas), which led to the many challenges nuns still face today. These special rules were laid down for the nuns' ordination process, and the nuns were required to abide by these rules for their entire life. All eight rules reflect Shakyamuni's placement of the monks above the nuns, regardless of age or experience as an ordained monastic member:

1. A nun, even if she has been ordained 100 years, must respect, greet, and bow in reverence to the feet of a monk, even if he has just been ordained that day.
2. A nun is not to stay in a residence where there is no monk.
3. A nun is to look forward to two duties: asking for the fortnightly Uposatha (meeting day) and receiving instructions by a monk every fortnight.
4. A nun who completed her rains-retreat must offer herself for instruction to both the community of monks and to the community of nuns, based on what is seen, what is heard, and what is doubted.
5. A nun who is put on probation for violating a monastic rule of Sanghadisesa must serve a fifteen-day minimum probation, with reinstatement requiring approval from both the monk and nun communities.
6. A woman must be ordained by both monks and nuns and may be ordained only after a two-year postulancy, or training in six precepts.
7. A nun may not reprimand a monk.

8. From today onwards, no nun shall ever teach a monk. However, monks may teach nuns.⁶

The first of the Eight Heavy Duties places nuns in a subordinate position to all monks, regardless of how long a nun has been ordained. Even if a nun has been ordained for over a decade and a monk was ordained that day she would have to pay reverence to his feet. Monks, on the other hand, pay respect to each other based on their seniority. This rule is blatant gender discrimination, and members of the monastic community are not treated as equals when it comes to gender.

The second rule implies a woman cannot take care of herself or be independent. Was the rule formed because Shakyamuni felt a woman needed a man to protect her? Perhaps so, but it is possible that the society also viewed women as untrustworthy and felt nuns must be closely monitored. Nonetheless, a monk could stay in a residence by himself.

Like the second rule, the third and fourth duties also impose an obligatory rite and requirements on only the nuns. The monks do not have to fulfill either of the two duties required of the nuns in the third duty. While nuns must offer instruction to the communities of both the nuns and the monks, the monks only have to offer themselves to the community of the monks.

When it comes to violating rules, the punishment for nuns is far harsher in comparison to that received by the monks. Nuns must serve a “fifteen-day minimum probation” and be reinstated with the approval the communities of both the nuns and monks, whereas a monk who violates a rule serves a five-day minimum probation and needs approval only of the community of the monks.

The sixth rule that was laid out by Shakyamuni led to the extinction of the Theravada nun lineage. The rule required the participation of both nuns and monks in the ordination of nuns. Further, a woman could only be ordained after a “two-year postulancy” or training in six precepts. A man, however, could be ordained by just monks and had no postulancy requirement. Scholars such as Sylvia Wetzell, however, contend this has nothing to do with discrimination or preference for one sex over the other, but simply reflects historical precedence: The first monks were ordained by a man, the historical Buddha; later a group of several monks who had been ordained for many years took further colleagues into their group. The first women were also ordained by a group of men, and later, experienced nuns joined the ordination ceremony. Today, nuns can be fully ordained only in those countries, primarily in Taiwan, in which there are still fully ordained nuns who can carry out the ritual with their spiritual brothers.⁷ Again, the contrast between Ananda and Shakyamuni’s reactions to women’s ordination refute the argument that these rules are not gender discrimination, but “simply” historical precedence. These two men lived during the same time period, belonged to the same family, and shared similar privileges and status. Buddhism brings to attention constant change, but many of its actual practices reflect resistance and fear of change. We will discuss later how this rule in particular has led to the hindrance of the human rights movement for equality and caused great sufferings for many women worldwide.

The last two duties re-emphasize the lower positions women hold in the Buddhist monastic community. Although any monk can reprimand a nun, a nun can never reprimand any monk. Similarly, any monk can teach a nun but a nun may never teach a monk. These last two rules can lead to many dangers for women, as it leaves women in a

defenseless position. Men did not even need to discuss with their wives if they wanted to join the Sangha, but a woman had to receive approval from her parents and husband.

As if the Eight Heavy Duties were not insulting enough to women, Shakyamuni also supposedly proclaimed his teachings will last only five hundred years rather than a thousand years because they allowed women to be ordained. According to the *Tripitaka*, Mahaprajapati immediately accepted Shakyamuni's eight "special" rules for women and was extremely happy: "I accept all the Eight Heavy Duties, and shall abide by them without fail throughout my life, like a young girl or boy who enjoys her beauty, having bathed and shampooed, accepts a garland of jasmine or lilac, accepts it with her hands and puts it on her head."⁸ Her response reveals she is delighted to move towards a nun status from a widow/mother status. One has to wonder what would have happened had Mahaprajapati not so eagerly accepted these rules for the ordination of women.

Obviously, Shakyamuni's forecast proved to be incorrect since Buddhism is now approximately 2,500 years old, which offers evidence that either Shakyamuni was not always correct or the literature contains inaccurate information. Paradoxically, Buddhism's actual age proves the Buddhist doctrine that things are constantly changing.

Buddhist practitioners formed numerous theories to explain why Shakyamuni established the Eight Heavy Duties and blamed the nuns' community for shortening the lifetime of his teachings. Commentators have made arguments that ranged from Shakyamuni's actions were to avoid being accused of nepotism to blatantly stating that these legends are completely false. Karen Andrews, who describes herself "as a female western Buddhist," claims:

Monastic Buddhism had to be acceptable to lay society, because the monastics were completely supported by the lay people. Therefore,

various rules were made to lower the status of the bhikkhunis, and this story was invented to justify the change. This explanation of the story of the Buddha's reluctance is possibly correct. The scriptures were not written down until four hundred years after the Buddha's death, which gave plenty of time for small changes to creep into the stories.⁹

Although it is certainly possible that the stories evolved into more sexist versions to keep the nuns subordinate to the monks, we must remember that it would not be out of place for a man, even Shakyamuni, living in northern India in 500 BCE to establish rules and make statements that were discriminatory towards women by modern western standards.

Furthermore, Shakyamuni limited the use of honorable titles for women to diminish their roles in society. Nuns also had to endure harsher punishment than monks for the same infractions. Kate Wheeler, in "Bowling, Not Scraping," asserts that we should view Buddhist patriarchy as history and not as a tool to employ in our own world.¹⁰

Did Shakyamuni feel threatened by women? The *Tripitaka* offers a fascinating story about an exchange between Shakyamuni and King Pasenadi of Kosala and nun Khema. Nun Khema was highly praised by King Pasenadi and the king even proclaimed the nuns' teachings were just as good as Shakyamuni's. In fact, a number of sutras that existed before Shakyamuni's death do not describe a king visiting a monk to learn the Dharma, but there are at least three cases in the *Tripitaka* where a king visits a nun during Shakyamuni's lifetime, which begs the idea perhaps Shakyamuni himself wanted to lower the status of women in his society because he noticed in his royal world that women were powerful and capable of learning and teaching the Dharma. This theory would explain why Shakyamuni used the phrase "from today onwards,"¹¹ which hints that nuns were teaching monks or men in general before he established the Eight Heavy

Duties and that Shakyamuni's fear of women's power and potential led him to establish the rule to end the activity.

Still, the unity of Mahaprajapati and the large group of noblewomen who marched with her opened up a new category for women. They no longer had to assume traditional roles as mothers, daughters, wives, courtesans, and prostitutes. In fact, numerous works of Buddhist scholarship reveal thousands of women flocked to join the Bhiksuni Sangha. It is highly probable Shakyamuni and other men not only felt threatened by women's capability to learn the Dharma, but also did not want to be outnumbered by the nuns. More nuns than monks in their community would increase the likelihood that the monks' power would diminish. Nevertheless, women today can learn from this strength of unity when confronting opposition, but they also need to be careful not to completely alienate the male community, as it is clear that the Bhiksuni order would not have been established without the support of Ananda and Shakyamuni.

The Books of Theragatha (Verses of the Elder Monks) and Therigata (Verses of the Elder Nuns) reflect the Buddhist nuns' active role in teaching the Dharma. The nuns were more active participants in the community than monks during Shakyamuni's time. They lived in the community and were active in teaching and learning. The monks, on the other hand, lived in solitude and did not have close ties with the community outside their own. For example, there is an episode where a nun publicly pronounced to hear her teachings. The *Tripitaka* does not reflect any cases of monks teaching in this way. *The Book of Therigata* reflects the earliest period of Buddhism when monks and nuns enjoyed equal rights, and it is the first religious text written by women.¹²

It is apparent Shakyamuni held some sexist tendencies, and we should recognize that despite his discriminatory acts towards women, he did approve the establishment of a bhiksuni order and taught a doctrine that focused on emptiness, which paradoxically refutes his initial sexist actions. Ananda, on the other hand, is a true hero for not just women but Buddhism as a whole. We should not be afraid to look at religious founders from a critical perspective and to point out their contributions and failures. As Wheeler says, “In the case of women, the Buddha was wrong and we have the courage to say so.”¹³

More importantly, does it matter that Shakyamuni viewed women as inferior to men? Does his sexist view make Buddhism worthless to women? Scholars such as Wheeler and Gross assert Buddhism is “worth it.” Likewise, I would argue that Buddhist doctrine actually teaches us not to discriminate against anyone or anything, and in fact, we should recognize gender and that there is nothing to discriminate against, because things do not truly exist. Gender is simply an illusion, and gender roles are socially constructed. These social constructions lead to suffering. To achieve Buddhahood, one must recognize the impermanence of these constructions. Therefore, Buddhist doctrine embraces genderlessness and the equality of men and women in achieving Buddhahood. For women, the challenge of Buddhism as an institution is to make it less hypocritical and more universal in its social practices.

The Inconsistencies in Sexual Transformation

Some Buddhist literature, including some of the most widely read sutras, portray women as highly realized beings. However, in real living society, average women in

general did not enjoy this privileged status. In *Women in Buddhism*, Diana Y. Paul shares some of her translations of the sutras that place women in both a positive and negative light. In three of the sutras she discovers women assuming powerful roles. Candrottara, Jewel Brocade, and Queen Srimala highlight the issue of sexual transformation.¹⁴ Some Buddhist practitioners argue only men can become enlightened because Shakyamuni was a man. As Kerry L. Fitz-Gerald elaborates, “The Mahayana tradition holds one of the thirty-two major marks of a Buddha is maleness, thus women cannot hope to become Buddhas unless they transform their female bodies into male.”¹⁵ This mark she refers to is a “retractable penis,” which many construe as a characteristic that is necessary to possess to become a Buddha. These marks were written down by Buddha’s disciples after his death to pay respect to him.

Like the 32 Marks of the Buddha, the Original Vows also maintain female sexual transformation into male form is necessary to achieve enlightenment. The Original Vows were taken by the Buddha when he was a bodhisattva in a past form. The thirty-fifth of these forty right vows highlights the necessity of sexual transformation from a female to a male body to achieve enlightenment. The literal interpretation indicates you must be in male form to achieve enlightenment. Others interpret this vow as a woman needing to transform into a man because she wants to escape the challenges of her harsh social circumstances. Regardless of which interpretation is preferred, the woman’s gender is in question and she must transform into a man.

In contrast to this argument that one has to be male to be awakened, Candrottara in *The Sutra of the Dialogue of the Girl Candrottara* proclaims sexual transformation is immaterial. She states: “The nature of Emptiness cannot be changed or altered. This is

also true for all phenomena. (Consequently) how could I change my woman's sex now?"¹⁶ She then transforms into male form. Paul explains Candrottara changes her female form to evade her womanly duties to marry and bear children, particularly sons. She suggests monks may have also added this transformation into a male body to defend their argument that one must possess a male sex organ to exhibit one of the marks of Buddhahood. The Buddhist theory of the Five Hindrances, for example, stresses why women cannot achieve enlightenment because of their female body.¹⁷ Hae-ju Sunim elaborates in "Can Women Achieve Enlightenment?" in *Buddhist Women Across Cultures* that due to their impure and evil nature, unbridled lust, arrogance, "84 latent bad qualities," and attachment to the material world, women cannot be reborn as the god Sakra, Brahma, King Mara, universal sage king, or as a Buddha.¹⁸

Along similar lines as Candrottara, Jewel Brocade in *The Sutra of Sagara, the Naga King*, argues:

You have said: "one cannot attain Buddhahood with a woman's body." Then one cannot attain Buddhahood within a man's body either. What is the reason? Because the thought of enlightenment is neither male nor female. The Buddha has said: "The one who perceives through the eyes is neither male nor female nor are (the perceptions of) the ears, nose, mouth, body and mind male or female. What is the reason? Because only the virtuous have eyes of emptiness. The one who perceives through Emptiness is neither male nor female. . . . The one who perceives through enlightenment has the Dharma which is neither male nor female."¹⁹

After this proclamation, Jewel Brocade becomes a Bodhisattva while maintaining her female form. Paul argues Jewel Brocade is highly important for those who contend women can achieve enlightenment. She also argues that Queen Srimala could be a female Buddha.²⁰ Others, such as Alex and Hideko Wayman, disagree with her, and argue Queen Srimala has achieved the last stages of Bodhisattva.²¹ Regardless of which

stage she has attained, Queen Srimala's highly realized stage remains a powerful role model for women who are working towards enlightenment.

These three cases all support a number of arguments on women's behalf. Candrottara, Jewel Brocade, and Queen Srimala are highly realized women who are revered and respected, and prove women are worthy and capable of learning and teaching. These sutras also reflect the sexless nature of the Dharma and that the forms of bodies are not issues because change is constant. The female realized beings offer women hope, an opportunity to argue for a different path diverting from the roles traditionally given to them in their society, and other possibilities.

The story of the sea dragon's daughter, Gautami, reiterates a similar message to the one Candrottara delivers, which also supports the need for a woman to become a man before achieving enlightenment. (There is never a case in which a man needs to change into a woman to achieve nirvana.) The story of the dragon girl in *Saddharmapundarika Sutra* begins with Prajnakuta asking Manjusri if he knows a person capable of achieving enlightenment. Manjusri shares with Prajnakuta that Gautami is on the path towards Buddhahood, practicing meditation and fully comprehending the Buddha's teachings. Upon hearing about Gautami's compassion and abilities, Prajnakuta finds himself troubled with the idea of an eight-year-old female achieving enlightenment. He does not understand how this is possible when so many men find achieving enlightenment so difficult. The sea dragon's daughter immediately comes forward and Sariputra expresses his problem concerning the female form and enlightenment: "It is hard to believe that you could attain perfect enlightenment in such a short time. Because a woman's body is

filthy, it is not a suitable receptacle for Dharma. How could you attain perfect Enlightenment?” Suddenly Gautami transforms into male form.²²

In the “Devatta” chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, Sariputra and the Bodhisattva Wisdom Accumulated doubted Gautami’s ability to attain Buddhahood based on the literature of the pre-Lotus sutras. Gautami, however, emerges before Shakyamuni and he portends she will achieve enlightenment and become a Buddha in her current form, as a female, child, and animal. Nichiren employs the story of the dragon king’s daughter to confirm his perspective that women can become a Buddha:

Various pre-Lotus sutras denied women the capacity to attain Buddhahood, regardless of whether one belonged to the realm of humanity or heavenly beings. It is thus wondrous that the dragon king’s daughter attained Buddhahood without having to change her physical appearance as a being of the World of Animality, retribution she suffered for neglecting the precepts.²³

Nichiren argues Gautami offers women a female model of attaining Buddhahood without changing one’s physical form. He argues:

. . . the example of the dragon king’s daughter, who achieved Buddhahood in her reptilian form through the power of the Lotus Sutra . . . without changing her reptilian form, attained the wonderful fruit of Buddhahood in the southern realm. Therefore, how much more likely is it that women who have been born into the human realm should be able to do so!²⁴

Despite her attaining Buddhahood in her present state, Gautami does transform her body into a male one when she appears before Shakyamuni and his disciples. Furthermore, she changes her form to a female animal and a child when she materializes in the Spotless World. Her transformations reflect social and physiological nuances and may be her method of arguing bodies are impermanent and are an illusion. However, why is the physical form not female in Shakyamuni’s presence? This necessity of a male form could be a sign of submission or another indication of ignorance.

Zeho Miwa argues that, based on the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life (*Ichinen sanzen*), there is no need for one to change their present form to attain Buddhahood. His argument echoes Nichiren's statement:

. . . In the various Hinayana sutras that were preached before the *Lotus Sutra*, it is denied that women can ever attain Buddhahood. In the Mahayana sutras other than the *Lotus Sutra*, it would appear that women can attain Buddhahood or be reborn in the pure land. But they may do so only after they have changed into some other form. It is not the kind of immediate attainment of Buddhahood that is based on the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life. Thus it is an attainment of Buddhahood or rebirth in the pure land in name only and not in reality. The dragon king's daughter represents "one example that stands for all the rest."²⁵

Kurihara points out this chapter was written at a later date in comparison to the other twenty-seven chapters in the *Lotus Sutra*, and that there are other examples of women achieving Buddhahood, such as Mahaprajapati, Yashodhara (the mother of Shakyamuni's son, Rahula), and the ten demon daughters in the "Encouraging Devotion" chapter, which follows the "Devadatta" chapter.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, we find sutras where women repudiate completely the idea of sexually transforming into a man to achieve enlightenment. We encounter most of these texts in the Mahayana tradition, which is considered "the great vehicle" of the Buddhist path by its adherents. "It is the vehicle of the bodhisattva, concerned with developing loving kindness and compassion towards limitless sentient beings, and realizing the emptiness and interdependence of the self and all phenomena."²⁶ In the case of the goddess Devi in *Vimalakirtinirdesa Sutra*, the goddess Devi and Sariputra debate about sexual transformation. Sariputra does not understand why she does not transform into a man and she tries to help him understand that the body does not exist and is impermanent. She explains to him, "For example, if a skilled magician

creates an illusory woman through his magical powers, could you reasonably ask why she does not change her womanhood?” Sariputra counters in the negative and Devi retorts, “Just so, all phenomena are unreal and illusory by nature. How could you think of asking someone to change her womanhood?” She then uses her powers and transforms herself into Sariputra’s form and changes Sariputra into her physical body and asserts, “Just as you now appear as a woman, so all women appear in the form of a woman, but are not women. It is with intention that the Blessed One said that all dharmas are neither male nor female.”²⁷ The goddess Devi is in complete control in this story and plays the role of the teacher. Note that the women who refuse to transform into male form are generally positioned higher in their social hierarchy with more power and control compared to the men in the stories.

Stories with women like the goddess Devi point out the emptiness of gender and the male attachment to the female body, which is consistent with the Buddhist teaching of impermanence. Unfortunately, these stories do not underscore the equality of women to men since the gender that is questionable in regards to whether the person can achieve enlightenment is always female.

In pre-*Lotus Sutra* teachings, women are strongly despised. The *Flower Garland Sutra* states, “Women are messengers of hell who can destroy the seeds of Buddhahood. They may look like bodhisattvas, but at heart they are like yaksha demons.” The *Silver-Colored Woman Sutra* states even if the eyes of the Buddhas of the three existences were to fall to the ground, no woman could ever attain Buddhahood.

Women are doomed to the five obstacles and three obediences for their profound sins. Buddhist scriptures reveal the five obstacles. Non-Buddhist scriptures teach the

three obediences, which means that, when a woman is young, she must obey her parents. When she reaches maturity, she must obey her husband. And when she is old, she must obey her sons. At any stage in life, her role is to serve a man.

Rong Jichyi numbered among his three pleasures the fact that he had not been born a woman. The Great Teacher Tiandai stated, “The other sutras only predict Buddhahood for bodhisattvas, but not for the two vehicles, and for men, but not for women.” He maintained that no sutra other than the *Lotus Sutra* predicts Buddhahood for women.²⁸

In fact, thousands of Buddhist sutras portray women as fit for damnation. For example, in *The Daimnoku of the Lotus Sutra* women are strongly condemned in both the Buddhist and non-Buddhist writings. The works known as the *Three Records* and the *Five Canons* of the Three Sovereigns and Five Emperors of ancient China depict them as fawning and crooked. For this reason, disaster is said to have come about because of the three women of antiquity. Thus women are identified as the cause of the downfall of a nation and its people.

The *Nirvana Sutra*, the Buddha’s last teaching that he delivered in the grove of sal trees, says, “All rivers and streams are invariably winding and devious, and all women are invariably fawning and crooked.” It also proclaims, “If all the desires and delusions of all men throughout the major world system were lumped together, they would be no greater than the karmic impediment of one single woman.” This passage describes how, because water is a pliant substance, when its path is blocked by some hard object such as a rock or a mountain, it will split into two streams or turn aside, flowing now this way, now that. Women share this path because they are weak. Though they may believe that

a certain course is right, if they come up against the strong will of a man and find their way blocked, and then they will turn in some direction quite different from the one they originally intended. You can locate pictures on the surface of water but nothing of what you have drawn will remain. Women are the same, according to the text, because their character constantly changes and vacillates. The text suggests women are feeble and lack determination. As a result, based on the arguments of this selection, women can never become Buddhas due to their devious ways.²⁹

The argument that women cannot achieve enlightenment because of their devious ways is repeatedly stated in Buddhist sutras, but a closer examination at their so-called theories reveal these arguments are simply overgeneralizations, and one could easily change the word “woman” or “women” to “man” or “men.” The description of someone who has a “[mind] that is soft and weak” or “will turn in some direction quite different from the one they originally intended” can be applied to an individual regardless of their gender or sexual orientation.

The Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra supports some scholars’ claim that women can achieve enlightenment: “Yet though all female beings were so despised in the various sutras, when Bodhisattva Manjushri spoke the single character *myo*, a woman was instantly able to become a Buddha . . .”. This passage in the Buddha’s first sutra declaring women “can destroy the seeds of Buddhahood,” and in his final sermon in the sal grove about how “all rivers and streams are invariably winding and devious,” are refuted by this statement. The views reflected in the *Silver-Colored Woman Sutra* and *Great Perfection of Wisdom* prove to be unconvincing. Wisdom Accumulated and Sariputra were forced to hold their tongues, while all the human and heavenly beings

present at the eminent congregation where the *Lotus Sutra* was proclaimed with their palms together in delight. This joyfulness resulted from the virtue of the single character *myo*.³⁰

Despite the elevation of women in some Buddhist texts, many Buddhist practitioners hold Shakyamuni's supposed words in their hearts, and unfortunately, Shakyamuni's establishment of the Eight Heavy Duties and blame towards women for shortening the life of Buddhism continue to create difficult obstacles for nuns. The problem of sexual transformation creates challenges for women in Taiwan in a number of ways. First, it is clearly discriminatory and demeans the female mind and body. Teachings and texts portray women as pitied creatures who need to assume male form to achieve enlightenment. This belief supports the view that women's bodies are dirty and cannot serve a spiritual purpose as male bodies can. In addition to the engendering of discriminatory practices towards women, it causes many women to view themselves as inferior and feel their stereotyped roles are natural and the treatment they endure is appropriate.

The problem with sexual transformation is the act clearly contradicts Buddhist theories. The Buddhist concept of emptiness or the nature of all real things is defined as "the lack of self existence in things. It is the true nature of mind and phenomena."³¹ This theory of emptiness indicates so-called realities are impermanent and do not exist; in other words, there are no ultimate realities. If nothing is permanent, then the idea women need to transform into men to achieve enlightenment clashes with the Buddhist idea of impermanence because the categories of men and women are not real. Therefore, the

notion women cannot attain Buddhahood because of their female body indicates there is a permanent reality, whereas the theory of emptiness argues for the opposite.

The theory “All Dharms are neither male nor female,” where dharmas refers to elements of existence, conflicts with the notion of the necessity of sexual transformation.³² If all elements of existence are “neither male nor female,” then all elements of existence are genderless. In fact, if gender is not real, the necessity for women to transform their female bodies into male bodies is not only absurd, but also impossible.

Many members of the younger generation of monks made an effort to diminish nuns’ prominent roles in the Buddhist community to fortify men’s status over women. The Eight Heavy Duties became a tool to suppress and control women, even the ones who were awakened and intelligent enough to teach monks the Dharma. As a result of these discriminatory rules, the nuns’ order disappeared in India after a few generations, and ultimately Buddhism disappeared in India entirely.

The Problem with Sex

Woman is conspicuously absent, or she appears in as much as she is an element of the Buddhist discourse on sexuality: not for herself, as individual, but as one pole of attraction or repulsion in a gendered male discourse about sex. Denied the role of a subject in this discourse, she is primarily the emblem of larger generative, karmic or social processes, with positive or negative soteriological value.³³

Why did Shakyamuni and the younger generation of monks want to lower the status of women? The *Vinaya* includes many more rules for women than men. There are 250 rules for monks compared to 348 rules for nuns in one account. The *Vinaya*’s rules obligate monks to participate in nuns’ ceremonies, which only underscores their view that

women are inferior and incapable of becoming awakened without men. Women are placed under the control of men. In most nunneries around the world, you will find the abbess must be male. The *Vinaya* also contains many rules that suggest women have problems controlling their sexuality. Rev. Patti Nakai describes her surprise when reading the *Vinaya*:

In an English translation of the *Vinaya* that I looked through at Otani University, I was surprised that many of the rules for nuns were about avoiding any behavior that could be taken as sexually suggestive. Some rules about what not to do were so graphic that it read more like someone's X-rated fantasies than guidelines to feminine modesty. This aspect of the *Vinaya* reflects the belief in ancient India that, because women existed mainly to please men and have babies, they were much more sex-driven than men. Due to this belief, the compilers of the *Vinaya* felt women needed many and more specific rules about controlling their sexuality than men did.³⁴

Since these texts were written by men, we could read these descriptions as voyeuristic or as male fantasies of female sexuality. It is interesting to note how men used women's biological ability to have children to argue that they are more sex-driven, and because of this sex drive they need to be controlled. However, women can just as easily argue that it is because of the men's sex drive that women are impregnated and it is the men who want to continue their patriarchal lineage. If we are to use the biological argument, then both men and women need to be equally controlled because it is obvious there are usually at least two parties involved.

These rules for women, especially regarding sex, actually reveal men are possibly the weaker gender when it comes to sex. Because of this weak point, we see a great span of Theravada literature focused on illustrating women as objects of revulsion to help men combat their lustful desires. Nakai compares this approach to "the desperate dieter trying to imagine all food as oozing, rotting substances too nauseating to eat," which both

targets their objects of desire and strives to convince them that the object is disgusting.³⁵ Shakyamuni was very aware of men's problem with sex. In one case, a courtesan became his follower and bequeathed all her riches to the Sangha. The men could not view her as a monastic member, however, because they were so enamored by her beauty. They could not comprehend that the physical condition is constantly changing until after her death, when Shakyamuni placed her body on display for the men to observe the decaying process. Women in Buddhist practice were frequently reduced to the physical, which the display of female cadavers upholds. The images of female cadavers found in literature, artwork, and woodblocks served the purpose of contemplative meditation, whereas we do not see a similar employment of male cadavers.³⁶ Liz Wilson contends this display is a teaching method by which women are teaching men through their bodies. She argues the female body is "made into a display board for the Dharma."³⁷ Although it is correct to say women's bodies are used to serve an educational purpose, the act of viewing women only at the physical level is disparaging. The technique of viewing women as objects of repugnance unfortunately led many men to view women as worthless creatures they should avoid and created more tension between monks and nuns. The view of nuns as fellow disciples who equally aspired to reach nirvana was overshadowed by men's aspiration to overcome their problem with sex.

Sylvia Wetzel presents an argument that some Buddhists employ to validate the superior status monks hold:

Sometimes Lamas of the Tibetan tradition justify preferential treatment of monks with the argument that those who have more rules to observe, lead a more valuable life. They refer with such comments to the fact that there were no fully ordained nuns in Tibet, only novices, who had fewer rules to follow than fully-ordained monks. Female novices observe just like their male colleagues who are not fully ordained.³⁸

Using this argument, Wetzel shrewdly points out that nuns should be valued more than monks since they must follow more rules. Unfortunately, this line of reasoning is mostly used when it favors leniency towards men.

In China, a sutra professed to be of Buddhist origin entitled the *Bloodbowl Sutra* entered mainstream culture, further lowering the status of women. The scripture maintains women defiled the earth by spilling their blood through the act of childbirth and menstruation. Also, women have polluted all the water on earth by cleansing their bodies and clothing in rivers and streams. This sutra has been internalized in the Buddhist psyche and contributes to the idea that women's bodies are repulsive.³⁹

This argument is irrelevant, first of all, because it is not only women who have defiled earth. Plenty of men have also washed their blood, feces, urine, and other items considered polluting in earth's water. Further, women's menstruation and childbirth are natural processes. In the case of menstruation, it is a cleansing process that keeps a younger woman healthy. It is no more revolting than feces or urine. We cleanse our bodies by acts of urination, eliminating feces, and menstruation. One could even form the argument that men are actually filthier since their dirty blood is never cleansed and remains trapped in their bodies. The act of childbirth cannot be blamed solely on women because men participate in the process. Therefore, this argument in the *Bloodbowl Sutra* is not based on any concrete evidence, but is clearly sexist.

In Buddhism, blood has often been used to justify the inferior status of women in society; this employment is a mechanism of violence against women. Women represented the ritual unclean, and the emphasis on blood and impregnation further highlighted an extraneous and unwanted substance. Women were not despised as being

impure for their association with the pollution of menstrual blood. Women were equated with ritual impurity. The significance of blood as pollution was stressed in order to justify their degradation and exclusion.

Women's bodies were not subjected to control because they possessed excessive sexual energy. They needed to be classified as worldly as the semantic scheme of religion as demarcated by the holy and secular. The presentation of women as dangerous was overstated to incorporate them into the secular value system. Every expression, whether verbal, written, or acted, was a mechanism of violence constructed to degrade women, and justify and convince them of its legitimacy.⁴⁰

This scheming mechanism of violence against women works effectively because it is absolutely natural and healthy for women to menstruate and perform childbirth. Thus, the social system provides a no-win situation for women. If a woman does not or cannot reproduce or menstruate, no man will want her and others may pity her. If a woman menstruates or gives birth, she is viewed with aversion.

Buddhist practitioners, such as Nichiren, argue that no sutras or treatises in the Buddhist tradition during Shakyamuni's time regard menstruation as unclean. He contends that the idea that women are impure based on the act of menstruation can be refuted by arguing Shakyamuni never placed menstruation in a negative light. Menstruation did not equate impurity to Shakyamuni, but instead was seen as a process that allows birth to occur. Like feces and urine, no special prohibition applies to menstruation because feces, urine, and blood are all substances produced by a healthy body.

Nichiren elaborates:

While the Buddha was in the world, many women in their prime became nuns and devoted themselves to the Buddha's teachings, but they were never shunned on account of their menstrual period. Judging from this, I would say that menstruation does not represent any kind of impurity coming from an external source. It is simply a characteristic of the female sex, a phenomenon related to the perpetuation of the seed of birth and death. Or in another sense, it might be regarded as a kind of chronically recurring illness. In the case of feces and urine, though these are substances produced by the body, so long as one observes cleanly habits, there are no special prohibitions to be observed concerning them. Surely the same must be true of menstruation.⁴¹

The selection below also reveals, however, that even a progressive man like Nichiren at times presented sexist views:

The character of man and woman differs from the outset. Fire is hot, and water, cold. Fishermen are skilled in catching fish, and hunters are proficient in trapping deer. A sutra states that women are clever at being jealous, but I have never heard that women are clever at Buddhism. A woman's mind is compared to a refreshing breeze; even if one could bind the wind, it would be hard to grasp a woman's mind. A woman's mind is likened to writing on water because the characters do not remain on the surface. A woman is likened to a liar, for sometimes a liar's words are true, and sometimes, false. A woman's mind is compared to a river, for all rivers bend.⁴²

He does, on the other hand, reveal his appreciation for the hardship women endure by performing childbirth. He calls on us to thank our mothers for the pain they endured from the time the child is conceived in the womb, and describes the pains of childbirth and child rearing:

At that time her belly is swelled as tight as a drum and her neck as unstable as a needle. She can only exhale but not inhale, and her complexion is the color of withered grass. When she lies down, her belly seems ready to split apart, and when she sits up, she can find no restful position for her limbs. When the time for her delivery draws near, the pain is so great that her hips seem to be torn apart and her eyes stare as though they would fly out of her head into the heaven.

Once she has succeeded in giving birth to this enemy who has caused her such pain, one might suppose she would fling it to the ground, tear open its belly and toss it aside. But such, of course, is not the case. On the

contrary, she forbears to think of her own pain, but hastens to take the child in her arms, wipes away the blood, washes off the unclean matter, and clasps it to her breast, and for a period of three years assiduously nourishes it.⁴³

This statement suggests it is a woman's nature to be a mother and to love her child.

Although on the surface it may appear as an admiring remark, it also confines women to motherhood. Once again, women are at the service of other family members and at the bottom of the family hierarchy.

As the notion of female impurity entered popular culture and the female psyche and as the roles of nuns diminished in the public sphere, the nuns' status became more and more subordinate. Throughout history there were progressive men who argued women were capable of achieving Buddhahood. Although their acts contributed to the survival of the Mahayana lineage of nuns, it was not enough to save the Theravada lineage of nuns. We must, however, confront the problem of discrimination against women, particularly in a religion that advocates compassion and progress. Buddhism, after all, is a champion of the inherent greatness of beings. Buddhism should, especially, empower the underprivileged. In Volume 5 of the *Lotus Sutra*, the dragon king's daughter says, "I unfold the doctrines of the Great Vehicle to rescue living beings from suffering."

There are the five obstacles and three obediences, the three persons that women must obey and the five obstacles that they face. The dragon king's daughter was a woman and she had experienced and understood the sufferings of women. She was determined to help and guide women because she endured and empathized with women's sufferings.⁴⁴

Select Buddhist passages reveal everyone can equally achieve enlightenment, regardless of age, gender, or sex. Regarding the attainment of Buddhahood, the *Lotus Sutra* proclaims “all attain the Buddha way,” and the sutra does not discriminate against women. It argues that when one understands the sutra’s teachings that good and evil are not two, that the correct and the incorrect are as one, one will eventually attain inner enlightenment. Therefore, it is called the attainment of Buddhahood in one’s present form. Because one attains enlightenment in this single lifetime, it is also called the attainment of perfect enlightenment in one lifetime. Though there are persons who do not understand the meaning, if they chant the daimoku, the Buddhas will rejoice. This is what the sutra means when it says, “[This sutra is hard to uphold; if one can uphold it even for a short while,] I will surely rejoice and so will the other Buddhas.”⁴⁵

Unlike Ananda, who was able to convince Shakyamuni to allow the establishment of the nuns’ order, Nichiren was unable to reach a critical mass to inspire equality among the sexes in his lifetime. Interestingly, there was a restoration of his teachings on the equality of beings to achieve Buddhahood after World War II, over six hundred years later, when *Lotus Sutra*-based religious groups emerged.

Impacted by the monks’ problem with sex the nuns’ lineage in Theravada countries died. The main reason why the nuns’ lineage did not survive is due to the rules imposed on them regarding how to carry out the ordination ceremony. A nuns’ ordination ceremony requires a certain number of monks and nuns, and the bhiksuni order did not have fully ordained bhiksunis in the Theravada tradition. The special rule of requiring monks to participate in a nun’s ordination gave monks control of the number of ordained women and left the women in a dying position.

Since Shakyamuni's time, Buddhist practices, teachings, and tradition have glorified men and dishonored women. What is believed by many to be Shakyamuni's sexist words and actions of Shakyamuni still pervades hearts around the world. Buddhist practitioners and scholars remember the sexist comments about women that Shakyamuni allegedly made. When one of Shakyamuni's disciples made love to his ex-wife, Shakyamuni proclaimed, "It would be better for you, foolish man, that your male organ should enter the mouth of a terrible and poisonous snake than that it should enter a woman."⁴⁶ When Ananda questioned why women could not sit in court and partake in business, Shakyamuni responded, "Womenfolk are uncontrolled, Ananda. Womenfolk are envious, Ananda. Womenfolk are greedy, Ananda. Womenfolk are weak in wisdom, Ananda."⁴⁷ It is interesting to note Ananda is much farther along the path towards enlightenment in comparison to Shakyamuni, who ironically is regarded with more prominence.

Essentialism versus Constructivism

Buddhist practitioners have argued that women's polluted nature is a part of their essential nature, meaning it is unchangeable and inherent in women and makes women who they are. However, scientific advancement, such as evolutionary biology, has brought to light that species are changeable. Similarly, Buddhist doctrine argues nothing has a defining essence and upholds the theory of impermanence and emptiness, meaning gender and gender roles are constructed by their history, societal structure, and social values.

Buddhist institutions unfortunately have long been patriarchal and sexist, with many claiming women are by nature inferior because of their dirty bodies. These institutions assert women have bad karma as a result of their previous lives, suggesting women have an “inherited” sin. Likewise, a number of Buddhist teachers have taught that men and women have different essential natures based on their past wrongdoings. Due to the inferior and corrupt nature of women, they argue women need to be governed by men. In other words, women deserve the status they hold as punishment for their mistakes in their prior forms. Dosen, a seventh-century Chinese Buddhist monk, even delineates the seven “sins” of women, which are the following:

1. They arouse desire in men.
2. They are envious.
3. They lack compassion.
4. They are superficial and materialistic.
5. They are dishonest.
6. They are shameless.
7. They possess unclean bodies.

Morrell argues Buddhist societies maintain women’s bodies are impure because “the evil demons vie for possession while the good deities depart.”⁴⁸ This idea that women’s bodies attract evil instills in the mainstream psyche not only disdain for women, but also fear of women as bad luck. Based on this belief and fear of contamination, “it was not possible for [women] to enter the holiest parts of monastery or temple compounds, or in extreme cases, to even set foot on the mountains where these retreats were built.” In addition, the *Menstruation Sutra* (*Ketsubon kyo*), a popular sutra read from the muju era to the nineteenth century, describes women as polluting the waters that were used to pay respect to the Buddhas every time they bled. This act made the Buddhas angry; as a result, women are always accumulating bad karma and will be

reborn in the “Bloodpond Hell.”⁴⁹ This selection indicates women are inferior by nature and offend the Buddhas simply by their physical existence. What is troubling about this assertion is Buddhist teachers have propagated this idea themselves and continue to do so, seldom engaging in constructive dialogue. Faure highlights how men are considered less gendered than women in Buddhist societies:

In Buddhist thought, there really is only one gender—femaleness since maleness is not considered problematic and not subject to interrogation. While we have a multitude of examples of male clerics discoursing on the disadvantages of female rebirth, there is no balancing voice that comes from women themselves where maleness is held up to scrutiny or regarded as problematic or “other”. Men are viewed within Buddhism as somehow less gendered than women, already, by virtue of their male anatomy, closer to an ideal of androgyny.⁵⁰

“Femaleness” became a disadvantage because female rebirth was seen as a chastisement. Similarly, the doctrine of the Five Hindrances conflicts with the principle of emptiness because it argues there is something inherent within women that prevent them from achieving enlightenment or even high forms of existence. Faure views this doctrine as a way of establishing “technical or juridical restriction” based on the rules established for nuns by the monks within the Sangha. The idea women cannot attain Buddhahood is based on the argument that it is because of women’s nature; unfortunately this belief has permeated throughout Buddhist cultures. Minamoto elaborates that the Three Subjugations even goes as far as viewing women as “terribly sinful, they are abandoned by the buddhas of the ten directions and fall into the hells with no hope of salvation.”⁵¹ This sexism occurred when a patriarchal structure arose, encouraging inequality. Scientific scholarship explains that things are constantly changing, validating the Buddhist theory of impermanence. Further research in chemistry, classical and quantum physics, genetics, and the nature of objectivity highlights the nonsensical claim that

women have an inherent soiled nature. However, this argument against women is prevalent in the history of many major world religions. Even in the western world, essentialism dominated for two thousand years. It was not until Newton's laws of motion that the essentialist edifice cracked. Before Newton the general belief was the "Unmoved Mover," where heavenly bodies possessed essential natures. Newton proved every action had an equal and opposite reaction. As a consequence, anything that produced a change was itself changed. Therefore all functioning things must be impermanent. These observations were never taken to their logical conclusion by European philosophers in Newton's day, possibly because heresy still attracted severe punishment in most European countries.⁵²

Newton's theory supports the Buddhist concepts of emptiness and cause and effect, both refuting the idea that women are by nature inferior to men. Mendeleev, who created the periodic table of elements in 1869, further supported the theory of impermanence through his research on atomic substructures. In the early twentieth century, research on radioactivity confirmed the composition of electrons, protons, and neutrons. The behavior of these elementary particles revealed constant change. These particles were only knowable by their interactions with other particles, and the mere act of observation changed their properties in an indeterminate way. Even worse, their "essential nature" seemed to change radically according to how they understood enormously, but had major social and political repercussions. The demolition of Genesis, which until then had been believed to be the gospel truth, completely removed the Bible-based justification for the repression of women and the "inferior races."⁵³ Likewise, quantum physics asserts the argument of "no-thing." Quantum physics views the

universe as being based on a cause-and-effect relationship in which everything is interdependent and constantly changing. Scientist Shahriar S. Afshar argues “there is ‘no such thing as a photon.’”⁵⁴

In relation to the argument that gender and gender roles are socially constructed and not inherent, as things are constantly changing, Sherry Ortner, a feminist anthropologist, questions “is female to male as nature is to culture?” Ortner refutes claims based on biological determination that argue women are inherently inferior to men and lack the potential to achieve enlightenment. She asserts women are “seen as representing a lower order of being, as being less transcendental of nature than men are”⁵⁴ and “ultimately, both men and women can and must be equally involved in projects of creativity and transcendence. Only then will women be seen as aligned with culture, in culture’s ongoing dialectic with nature.”⁵⁵

Not all Buddhist monks viewed women as inferior. Dogen (1200–1253) frequently criticized the monks’ sexist attitudes towards women. In his sermon *Raihaitokusui* in *Shobogenzo*, he highlights women who were Buddhist teachers in the Chan tradition. He argues that any man would be extremely lucky to have them as their teacher. He further defends women as equals:

What demerit is there in femaleness? What merit is there in maleness? There are bad men and good women. If you wish to hear the Dharma and put an end to pain and turmoil, forget about such things as male and female. As long as delusions have not been eliminated, neither men nor women have eliminated them; when they are all eliminated and true reality is experienced, there is no distinction of men and women.⁵⁶

Dogen recognized that discrimination towards women was against basic Buddhist doctrine, and taught others that maintaining this view will only continue suffering. Unfortunately, Levering highlights how Dogen’s written attacks on the monks’ sexist

behavior were frequently deleted to end his teachings, showcasing the efforts made not only to silence women's voices, but also to silence men who spoke on their behalf.⁵⁷

Western scientific research between 1850 and 1950 radically changed the way we view the world, although there is still resistance to these “dangerous” ideas. These advancements support the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence and perhaps explain the increasing population of Buddhist enthusiasts in the West. Unfortunately, Buddhist institutions still practice acts of discriminatory behavior towards women that conflict not only with scientific theories, but also their own concepts. The Buddhist practice of sexism towards women in everyday life blocks modernization and progress.

Economic Realities

Did the monks want to reduce the number of nuns? From my perspective the monks felt threatened by the nuns because they knew they were equally capable of learning and inspiring the community, perhaps even more so. Buddhist enthusiasts can debate about the various religious reasons why women are discriminated against, but a closer analysis reveals women were and continue to be suppressed by many monks, and sometimes even by other women, due to economic reasons. The bhiksu order's privilege and power grants them strong financial support from the lay community, which allows for the building of facilities and education resources. Their ability to continuously attain these assets corresponds to a constant rise in social status. Nuns, on the other hand, did not have these opportunities available to them, and the monks clearly have made an effort to control what they share and with whom. This control allows the monks' order to create alliances with key players that further increase their power.

Monks who discriminate against nuns are not the only ones to blame for the sufferings nuns have faced. Both laywomen and laymen generally favor the bhiksu orders over the bhiksuni Sangha. This favoritism has been instilled and it is believed that donation to monks equate to more points in their “karma account.” In order to possess a higher value in their karma account, even wealthy women generally donate to the order of the monks because they believe it will offer them a happier future or give them more status in this life and those after. When a woman has the opportunity to learn Buddhist teachings and practices, there is a strong likelihood that she will confront pity from others or experience self-pity simply for possessing a female form. Sylvia Wetzels shares such an experience in *The Heart of the Lotus*:

I remember two western monks in the early 80’s who naively confided to me: “I feel so sorry for you. I have finally succeeded in becoming a man in this life. But you can pray for a male incarnation in your next life.” In 1977 Nepal I met a western nun who beamingly exclaimed that she was praying for a male reincarnation, and she was born in Hollywood, California!⁵⁸

Many monks’ greediness and desire to reserve the economic resources for themselves is in actuality a poor economic decision for the society at large. There is a general fear of change and apprehension that the monks’ resources would be reduced. However, if laywomen possess equal access to the facilities, support, and educational resources as their male counterparts, they would be encouraged to and have the ability to support the bhiksuni orders, and the nuns, as a result, would have more funding and achieve a greater status. In fact, many individuals may actually contribute more to the orders if they noticed more emphasis on equal opportunity rather than on patriarchy. In Taiwan, where nuns outnumber monks and have access to great resources and opportunities, the community respects the nuns tremendously and views the monastic community as a

unified whole. Thus, Taiwan's total amount of support available to the entire Sangha has increased dramatically over the years. Buddhist practitioners all over the world come to Taiwan and make their contributions in support of their notion of equal access to the path of enlightenment and to achieve Buddhahood.

Since Buddhist rules have been sexist since its inception, the Buddhist world also contains predominantly male symbols and supremacy. These rules are further supported by the literature, which underscores the devaluing of the female and argues for the disadvantages of a female incarnation. This inferior status is even built into languages and transcends just the Buddhist communities. For example, "woman" in Tibetan translates into "lower birth" (*kya men*). One of the eight positive traits for a strong spiritual life in the Tibetan tradition is to have a male body (seventh positive characteristic). These rules and the Buddhist literature that supports them are problematic because they are treasured and taught to Buddhist practitioners without any critical analysis. Here we see the need for those outside the tradition to address problematic issues to improve women's conditions. Chinese, on the other hand, is a more androgynous language in which it, she, and he all share the same character. This androgynization is a necessary step towards equality.

Women throughout the world, regardless of whether they are Buddhist or non-Buddhist, deserve economic freedom, an opportunity for an education, respect from men and other women, and self-respect. Buddhism, as a religion, can only strengthen the Sangha and society as a whole if it takes a special responsibility to ensure the preservation of the bhiksuni order and proper training for nuns. As the opportunities and respect for nuns increase, the number of nuns joining the bhiksuni order will

subsequently increase. This increase will lead to more resources for laywomen, and popular culture will accept this new role of women as nuns. Women will then have more role models and support systems, which are currently lacking in the Buddhist patriarchal system, which is still extremely male dominated.

Nuns in Buddhist communities in the Mahayana tradition, especially in Taiwan, are very active in their communities by providing social services. They help the elderly in their homes, nursing homes, and retirement communities, as well as helping in orphanages, cemeteries, and education centers. These services benefit all people, regardless of gender or age. If more mainstream cultures around the world accept this beneficial role offered by the nuns, communities would strengthen and suffering, particularly among the disadvantaged members, would decrease.

Education has traditionally been an important focus of the Buddhist Sangha. In places like Tibet, the monastery operates like a school, which explains the large population of monks. As proven in the case of Buddhist nuns in Taiwan, educational opportunities for nuns leads to a greater population of nuns and the education level of the entire community also would substantially increase. The increase in the education level of an entire society would lead to the creation of more teachers available to teach both men and women.

Women, after all, comprise approximately half of the world population and surpass men in life expectancy. An increase in the number and strength of the bhiksuni order would help ensure the continuation of Buddhist teachings, ultimately increasing the power of the Dharma. Buddhism has capacity for change, and in fact, teaches us things are incessantly changing. In relation to women's rights, the Dalai Lama recently said, "It

is correct to struggle for one's rights, not with pride or jealousy, but with a view toward taking on one's own share of responsibility in the critical task of improving the quality of human society.”⁵⁹

Buddhist Violence Against Women

Despite the efforts of nuns in Taiwan to reinstate the nuns' order, women in many parts of Asia not only are facing discrimination, but also are victims of violence. Such is the case in Thailand. We often hear Buddhists argue that Buddhism is the only major religion that has no cases of violence, but unfortunately there are cases of violence in Buddhism. Ouyport Khuankaew, Coordinator for the International Network of Engaged Buddhists' (INEB) Women's Project, shares her experiences in observing violence against women in Thai Buddhism. She argues Thai nuns are considered to be on the lowest level of the social hierarchy because they have no official status.

The main problem Thai Buddhism brings to society, however, is violence against women in the form of prostitution and domestic violence. Boys have the opportunity to attain an education, and it is traditional for a man to be ordained as a form of respect to his parents. Men are even allowed to take a leave of absence from their regular job for three months to pursue ordination. Girls, however, do not have these opportunities and have limited occupational choices. Khuankaew contends girls have the option to become “a maid, a factory worker or a prostitute” and some of them “ended up in brothels as a result of sexual abuse from the male members of the households in which they were employed.”⁶⁰

She shares that this preferential treatment towards boys over girls is most evident in northern Thailand, which has made headlines for its high levels of prostitution. In the past ten years, girls as young as eight have been sold by parents and the money used to pay debts, to send her brothers to school, to build a new modern house, or to buy a pick-up truck for her family. This epidemic has spread to the northeast of the country, where the suffering hits the rural poor the hardest. Pattaya, a famous beach and resort town two hours southeast of Bangkok, is full of girls from the northeast, many earning their living as sex workers. In the past ten years, young Thai women have also gone overseas to be prostitutes, despite the risk to their own lives, because the financial return is higher than at home.⁶¹

Buddhist practitioners may argue that the government should be blamed for the desperation of women, but there is no clear boundary between Thai Buddhism and Thai government. Thai Buddhism, like the governing system, is corrupt, patriarchal, and institutionalized. Their discriminatory attitude towards women is not isolated; it is a part of not only the male psyche, but also the female psyche. In fact, the Thai prostitute population is so high that it is equal to the number of monks. If young, rural girls could be given the same opportunity as the boys to enter a monastic life, they would have access to education and at the same time be able to repay spiritual gratitude to their parents. These opportunities could provide girls and women with proper monastic education and spiritual guidance so they can become important spiritual guides for the rural population, particularly other women and girls. Due to male dominance within Thai Buddhism, however, girls and women have been deprived of such an opportunity. It has been difficult for nuns ordained in Taiwan to crack this rigid system. Consequently, girls

and women are victims of different forms of violence, such as domestic violence, rape, and forced prostitution.⁶² Most monks in Thailand today do not even enter monkhood to seek spiritual enlightenment but rather to cheat the system by using the resources and opportunities; they eventually disrobe and marry right away. In Thai society this course of action has become accepted. In fact,

. . . the rural villagers tolerate monks who break their discipline (*vinaya*) by drinking or having illicit sex, because they need a monk to perform Buddhist ceremonies such as funerals and the temple's religious events. Those who are devoted to real Buddhism have to go visit the Northeastern forest monks who mostly live in caves or in an isolated temple situated near the forest. One of my sisters has been very supportive to some of forest monks, after many years of merit making to several monks in our area. She told me that she found out only after many years of reading Buddhist books that the monks in our area are not really monks. After she found out how real monks should behave and practice, she tried to convince some monks and villagers in our area to invite the forest monks to live in the same local temples. Her attempt failed because the local monks told her that those monks are not the same tradition as ours.⁶³

Buddhism in Thailand today functions ceremonially, and the monks' role is mainly to perform ceremonies. The rural population turns to other spirits and superstitions for hope and refuge. The reasons why the local people turn to the spirits now are not the same as in the past. Historically, it was for worship in the sense of showing gratitude and respect to the unknown higher power. Today, people go to fraudulent monks, shamans and shamanesses, trees, and statues (including Buddha images) for luck to win the lottery, for a cure for difficult illnesses, and for protection of their children who have gone to sell their labor in big cities or foreign countries. Rural women suffer more because their sons and husbands are alcoholics. As a result of alcoholism, which has become widespread in most rural communities over the past ten years, many women in villages have become the major income earners of the household.

Interestingly, most men also have more than one wife, and even as many as or more than thirty wives. This family structure allows one man to gain a higher economic status by having more wives, while not having to work at all. Khuankaew shares her personal experience of observing her father's violence against her own mother:

Although we were very poor, the most suffering thing for us, my mother and the six children, was the violence of my father. When we did not have rice to eat, my mother would walk with a wooden basket on her hip asking our neighbor to borrow rice for the next days. When my father beat us and threatened my mother, we did not know where and who to go for help. Because of such violence, my oldest sister ran away from home when she was 13, before I was born, and she did not return until 15 years later. This has been the reason why I have always believed that violence against women is the worst form of violence because it can happen every day, at any moment in your own home, and most of the time by the one you love. . . . When I was young the only thing I would figure out to help the situation was telling my mother not to take care of my father when he was sick so that he would die and then we all would have peace. When I was about 14, I managed to stand up for my sister who was abused by her husband who lived in our house.⁶⁴

Khuankaew's experience with violence reveals Buddhism's discriminatory attitude traced back to the literature about Shakyamuni only encourages the devaluing of women and influences men to treat women as objects they can mistreat with intense cruelty. Women take the burden on all sides in Thai society because they have to serve the men to shameful extremes and provide for the family in economic and material terms. Men feel so privileged that they feel comfortable abusing their wives in the homes of their in-laws. More urgent than educational opportunities and resources, women do not even know how to get help to escape the violence and abuse they endure. Khuankaew's case reveals how women are the primary income earner in their families but they still cannot escape gender discrimination and violence. Their helplessness indicates there are a host of ideological reasons, including personal beliefs, guilt, shame, fear of being judged, fear of her

husband, and even being used to the violence or feeling she deserved the abuse. Without educational opportunities and support centers, women have no hope of escaping violence caused by gender discrimination in Thailand and other parts of the world.

Special Responsibility to Restore the Nuns' Order

To achieve gender equality, Buddhist institutions must first restore the order of the nuns where the order has disappeared, and offer opportunities and resources to foster the order's development and advancement and to protect women against abuse. Many current practices in Buddhist societies are hypocritical and do not reflect the actions of compassion, love, and peace.

The nuns' order died out in India in the ninth century, in Sri Lanka in the tenth century, and in Burma in the thirteenth century as a result of the discriminatory treatment women faced and the lack of support from the laypeople. No attempt was made to restore these lineages, whereas when the order of monks was close to extinction in the eleventh century in Sri Lanka, the king sent Burmese monks to Sri Lanka to ensure the order of the monks flourished. The monks were always viewed as more important than the nuns. It is even possible that perhaps the king wanted the nuns' order to die. The act of saving only the monks' lineage, and not the nuns', makes this accusation a valid proposal.

The nuns' order today remains strong primarily in Taiwan, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. This strength indicates the nuns' ability to overcome harsh circumstances and their adaptability. The Hakka share this experience and ability, so it is not surprising that the monastic community in Meinong is overwhelmingly Hakka and female. In mainland

China the Communist government keeps a close watch on religious activities, but in Taiwan they have been allowed to thrive to an unforeseen level. The fully ordained nuns in China and the Far East have flourished since the order's inception in the fifth century.

Lamentably, the fully ordained nuns' order has not reached many other parts of Asia, such as Bhutan, Cambodia, Laos, Sikkim, and Tibet. In some of those countries, there are unofficial nuns who live as fully ordained nuns but do not hold the status of fully ordained nuns. For example, many of these nuns have accepted the eight or ten basic precepts. The terms for these devout laywomen are *thila shin* in Burma, *mae ji* in Thailand, and *dasasilmattawa* in Sri Lanka. They hold a very low or an unclear status in their society and dedicate their lives to spiritual advancement through meditation.

Thila shin encounter different attitudes because of their unclear place in Buddhism and society as a whole. The *thila shin* do not face antagonism in comparison to the *mae ji* and *dasasilmattawa*. Some *thila shin* are respected by their communities because they serve as meditators and teachers, but in general they are not as respected as the monks. They are supported by the lay donors because they perform religious rituals in which they receive money. *Thila shin* also are encouraged to educate themselves through Buddhist texts. These laywomen may not hold an official status as a fully ordained nun and certainly are not as respected as monks, but they are not viewed with disdain in their communities.

The majority of *mae ji*, on the other hand, are extremely poor and old. Their communities do not offer them support because the laypeople do not receive any merits for giving them anything. As a result, all the financial support is given to the order of the monks. They are blocked from receiving Buddhist resources that are offered within the

Sangha, and their communities view them with condescension as they would homeless people.

The only way these devout laywomen in the Theravada tradition can be ordained is through the fully ordained nuns in the Mahayana tradition. The ordination procedures in the countries that practice Theravada Buddhism must institute a system where Mahayana Buddhist nuns can fully ordain Theravada laywomen. Unfortunately, the majority of the Theravada monks views the Mahayana practitioners, even Mahayana monks, as corrupt or wants the public to perceive them as debased. The rituals and practices are actually quite similar in these two traditions, but there are some key doctrinal differences. Both traditions abide by the *Vinaya* precepts, so it would not be very difficult to carry out the establishment or re-establishment of the order of nuns in Theravada countries. Regrettably, few of the laywomen are even aware of the similarities between these two traditions and do not recognize the option of receiving full ordination through Mahayana fully ordained nuns since many of them lack the opportunities and resources to educate themselves about the outside world. Many Theravada women who are aware of this option to be ordained in Taiwan also hold the view that Mahayana Buddhism is corrupt. As in the 2,500 years of Buddhist history, most Theravada men today still are protective of the resources they receive and do not want to share the majority of these resources. Instead, many men use their influential positions to teach the nuns and their communities that the Mahayana Buddhists are inferior and have degraded Buddhism.

In fact, conservative monks are infuriated at the idea of changing the status quo. Currently there is tremendous opposition to the restoration of the order of nuns in

Theravada countries, and the monks in the Theravada tradition blame the influences of feminism and the West for creating this problem. The majority of these laywomen who are opposed to restoring the nuns' order in Theravada countries are badly informed or they feel if they become a fully ordained nun, they would be even more restricted. For example, the *dasasilmattawa* believe they have more freedom than fully ordained nuns because they do not have to endure the harsh rules of the *Vinaya*. Since they are unofficial nuns, they are not under the control of the monks' order. There is actually a sense of moral superiority among the *dasasilmattawa*, and they do not want the monks, who they view as morally less pure, to have official power over them. The power relationships between monks and nuns have been problematic since Buddhism's inception.

Educated women and some men today, primarily in the Mahayana tradition and in the West, recognize the importance of restoring the nuns' order where it has disappeared and to encourage the establishment and proliferation of the order of nuns around the world. Although Buddhist institutions, even in the Mahayana tradition, have established harsh rules for women to follow and it may seem as if it is easier to start a new category for women, the highly realized beings who want to realize the goal of gender equality recognize that we must take steps towards ensuring gender equality within Buddhist institutions. If women create new systems outside of the Buddhist institutionalized systems, women will never break down the patriarchal structure that has led to their suffering. Women need to fight for equality, or the historical acts of discrimination will persist.

A restoration of the nuns' order will lead to greater security and stability, and as the number of fully ordained nuns grows, they too will gain more influence and power in mainstream society and help mold contemporary society and Buddhist history. The educated women and men in Taiwan want to restore the nuns' order and earned the approval of the monastic and lay populations. They are up for the challenge of ordaining women around the world. The fully ordained nuns in Taiwan, with the support of Buddhist monks and scholars, are making great strides in this direction.

CHAPTER 3

Chinese Buddhism: The Synthesis of Past and Present

In the first century CE, Buddhism traveled to China and brought with it a long history of patriarchy and formed views. Buddhism introduced new notions in China, such as the idea of trained religious practitioners remaining celibate and living in communities under very strict rules. Buddhism also created a new option for women, an opportunity to escape the burdens of traditional Chinese marriage and motherhood. This alternative is certainly strongly preferred for people outside of the heterosexual parameter. Nuns held their own category in Chinese society and were viewed as a member of the religious profession. They were referred to as *qu jia*, meaning left the family. As in the past, the *Vinaya* sutras placed the nuns in an inferior position to the monks. In China at this time, nuns still had to bow down to any monk regardless of seniority and could not teach monks. However, Buddhism did introduce a new path for Chinese women, which many found to be the best option.

At this time, the Buddhism brought into China argued women could not attain Buddhahood in their female form. Even though this was the case, the majority of the Buddhist devotees in China were women, and women continue to be the majority. In earlier times, women's activities as Buddhist practitioners included praying at temples, taking care of the altars within their residence, and going on pilgrimages. It is through Buddhism that women slowly placed themselves outside of the home, although they continued to conduct their duties inside the home as well.

Buddhist laypeople, regardless of gender, received the Three Refuges and abided by the Five Precepts. The Five Precepts are not killing, not stealing, not lying, refraining

from engaging in prohibited sexual relations, and avoiding imbibing alcohol. The laypeople were vegetarians and frequently belonged to societies that recited sutras. It was at this time that women took some control of the finances within the organization. It was the women who were the fundraisers and who funded activities such as festivals, programs, and certain projects. Women also organized these events and endeavors. Because of the already instilled belief that the home was the appropriate place for women, it was deemed necessary for women to stay in the home; the exception was women could go outside of the home if it was for a religious purpose. As a result, many women embraced this new “freedom.” Nuns began to offer Chinese women a basic education, another opportunity few women received prior to the emergence of Buddhism in China.

The Onset of Religious Daoism

By the time of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), religious Daoism had taken shape and became a tradition of spiritual healing. This tradition was embraced by common citizens and broadly included all deities. It argued that immortality can be achieved in a person’s lifetime.

During the days of the Han dynasty, women held “magical” roles. In the early days of religious Daoism, women acted as the chief priests of local communities of believers. Women could also become Daoshi (Daoist masters), and are recorded as having achieved immortality by following a path just as rigorous as the men’s. Although women were capable of becoming immortals, considerably fewer women than men are recorded as having done so.

Religious Daoism includes the texts of philosophical Daoism, though it understands those texts as manuals in immortality. So, while the tradition uses early Daoist texts, like the *Laozi*, that do privilege the female over the male, it does not argue for the equality of women. This may be because, with the growth of the organization, religious Daoism took in Confucian and Buddhist ideas as well. Early in its development, Daoism began to talk about rituals, morality, and the proper harmony of families in the same way that Confucianism did. From Buddhism, religious Daoism took the ideas of celibacy, karma, and samsara. Organizationally, it modeled itself on Buddhism, developing orders of monks and nuns. Unlike Buddhism, Daoism has an organizational head, the Celestial Master. Like Buddhism, it offered women an option for a religious life as a nun and allowed women to devote themselves to particular deities or attend temples for healing. Religious Daoism does not see itself as a radical alternative to Confucianism and Buddhism, but as a place where all these teachings meet.¹

In China, we can see the impact of different religious elements and how the major traditions that became established in China influence and speak to each other. In the case of religious Daoism, Buddhism strongly influenced the tradition, in particular with its opportunities for women to escape the confines of only domestic duties. With Buddhism and Daoism hand in hand, women began to take steps outside of their domestic quarters.

The Common Practice of Popular Religion

Popular religion comes in a variety of forms and even today is practiced among ordinary people regardless of their religious affiliation. The worship of local gods and

the celebration of Chinese New Year are rituals practiced by almost everyone in China, whether they consider themselves Buddhist or Daoist. Popular religious rituals are vital to most people and can include a huge range of activities from the worship of local or city gods to the organization of and attendance at festivals. In fact, one could argue that popular religion is actually composed of elements of different religious traditions. For example, a Chinese funeral incorporates elements of Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist deities, ideas, practices, and rituals. The event is performed according to Confucian ritual practice. A Daoist monk prays while Buddhist monks chant sutras for the dead. Another example of an event where people incorporate practices from various traditions is Chinese New Year. During Chinese New Year people worship ancestors according to Confucian teachings and eat Buddhist vegetarian meals. People also visit Buddhist temples to pray to Guan Yin, a major female goddess in the Chinese Buddhist tradition (who was formerly male in India), and also visit local temples to worship local gods. A frequent saying in Chinese culture is, “All the Buddhas teach the same dharma,” meaning people do not see the “great” religions in conflict with each other but rather speaking to each other. Whereas in the West many people attempt to demarcate strong boundaries and categorize themselves within a religion or branch of religion, the Chinese in traditional and modern times do not view themselves strictly in a sectarian way.

In Chinese history, the wealthy educated elite were disgusted with the practice of shamanism by women, and by the thirteenth century the practice was outlawed; however, these divination practices continued. This group viewed divination practices with condescension because they felt “magical” practices were manipulative, false, and childish superstitions. The Chinese government during those times feared the power of

divination practices because the popular religion cults often caused rebellions that could destroy a leader and his ruling company.

Major Religious Texts, Interpretations, and Rituals

The following is an examination of the texts, interpretations, and rituals of major Chinese religions. Although this book is centered on Buddhism, I believe it is necessary to cover some major Confucian and Daoist texts, interpretations, and rituals to understand how religion functions in the lives of people in Taiwan.

Confucianism covers a spectrum of topics, and the tradition abounds in historical texts, poetry, ritual practices, and philosophy. Modern scholars have refuted the idea that these texts were written by one man named Confucius, but it was the generally held belief in traditional China. The classics were viewed as guides of propriety written by a man (or rather men). They were not viewed as being written by a divine source and were not considered sacred.

In order to pass civil service examinations and assume positions in government in traditional China, men must study these classics and have them memorized. To reach a certain level of government, a man needs to pass a series of examinations. This examination procedure supported the importance of Confucianism and propagated the view that the classics are authoritative sources of wisdom. More importantly, Chinese society functioned based on the classics. Confucian authority was underscored first by the elite and eventually by the common people.

The *Shi Jing* or *Book of Poetry*, one of the oldest texts among the classics, delineates the roles of sons and daughters and how they should be treated. It describes,

“while sons sleep on the couch and play with scepters, daughters sleep on the ground, play with tiles, and ‘it will be theirs neither to do right or wrong / They will think only about the spirits and food / And how to cause no sorrow to their parents.’”² Another common theme among Confucian classics is that women are to blame for society’s downfalls. For example, in the *Book of History*, it states: “A clever man builds strong walls / A clever woman overthrows them / Beautiful is the clever wife / But her heart is cruel as the owl / Women with long tongues / forecast evil / Disasters are not sent down from heaven / They originate in wives.”³ Further, the classics instill a fear of women with an extra warning to beware especially of the beautiful ones: “Where there is extreme beauty, there will surely be extreme wickedness” (*Zuo Zhuan*).⁴ The classics blame women and present women as destroyers (“overthrows [strong walls]”), “cruel,” “forecast evil,” and “wicked.”

To avoid the dangers women bring, a number of Confucian classics instruct men on how to regulate these “threats.” The *Li Ji* or *The Book of Rites* details how certain rituals, both state and private, should be performed, including funerals and marriages. It also specifies the separation of men and women. For instance, men and women cannot sit on the same mat or touch each other when giving each other something, and women must live in the innermost quarters while men live in the outermost.

Marriage in traditional China was a tool that unites families, not simply the union of two individuals. *The Book of Rites’* “The Meaning of Marriage” proclaims, “The ritual of marriage is meant for the love between families of two surnames. For those above, the ancestors, it is to maintain services in the ancestral temple; for those below, descendants, it is to secure children to carry on the family line” (*Li Ji*, “Hun Yi”). The wife’s main

role is to obey and serve the men in her life. Confucianism views the duties of the wife and husband as neutralizing and distinct. The women's world was within the household and the men's roles were outside the home.

The Book of Rites also detailed the performance of funeral rituals, which depended heavily on a person's social status. Ancestor worship involved both the husband and wife; however, the ancestors being revered were only the husband's ancestors. The sole ritual in the classic text centered on the woman is a ritual of a woman's hair-pinning, which is performed when a girl is coming of age.

During the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE), Confucianism was the state orthodoxy. Women's status continued to decline, and this view of women's proper roles permeated throughout China. During the second century, Zhang Daoling claimed he received revelations from Laozi, who was now considered a god. He alleged that the revelations showed him how to cure disease, the proper way to pray to the gods, how to recite the *Laozi*, and the appropriate way to organize religious Daoism. These revelations were written down and comprise a set of 1,426 volumes. Eventually texts on inner and outer alchemy, offering details on how to reach immortality through meditation and the imbibing of special elixirs, were added to this canon. The classic texts include cases of women becoming immortals, although these were few, and emphasize the different paths men and women take to achieve immortality because of yin and yang. The religious Daoist priesthood originally gave men and women the same status as priests and allowed them to marry. Since its early history and still today, women compose the majority of the religious Daoist population.

Similarly, women make up the majority of the Buddhist population. Most Buddhists in China practice Mahayana Buddhism and believe women can achieve enlightenment in their female form. In other words, gender is irrelevant. They recognize, however, that the majority of the Buddhist sutras suggest gender does matter and a woman is not capable of attaining Buddhahood. Sutras, as in the Pure Land School, state that a woman's rebirth is so depressing that they should hope for a male rebirth in the Pure Land. However, earlier sutras also presented cases of women who reached enlightenment. Overall the sutras argue that chaste women, such as nuns, are holier than women who engage in sexual activities, but still have a lower potential to reach enlightenment compared to men. The meditation sutras also were inherited by the Chinese, and many sutras describe women as temptresses, physically and intellectually weak, and corrupt.

As in Confucianism and many other religions, a fear of the dangers of the female was instilled among some Buddhists, which has led to the view that it is necessary to control the female. As in Confucianism and Daoism, Buddhism also claims sexually inactive women as the most virtuous. Buddhism adapted to the Chinese cultural necessity for women, including fully ordained nuns, to submit to men. In reality, this inferiority was nothing new considering women across Asia generally are expected to submit to men.

The Rituals of Ancestor Worship

The oldest ritual that exists in Chinese religions is the practice of ancestral veneration, which I discussed briefly in a prior section. This ritual is considered basic,

and almost all Chinese citizens worship their ancestors. The ritual is believed to have existed 1,000 years before Confucius. The materials needed to perform the ritual include a wooden tablet with the names of the deceased engraved on it; food, drinks, and incense are offered to the ancestors; and family members bow and “speak” to the ancestors by reporting anything new. The wooden tablets are arranged by consanguinity.

The ancestors worshipped by the descendants are both women and men, but they are all ancestors of the husband. A female ancestor is linked to her husband’s name on the wooden tablet. She is thereby worshipped by her sons, daughters-in-law, or her husband’s family’s male lineage.

The yin-yang symbol is one of the most prevalent symbols to represent gender. The circular form is divided into interweaving halves. One side is black, or yin, and the other side is white, or yang. Dong Zhongshu explains yang represents the heat of summer, the period of the most heat and light; yin represents winter, the period of deepest cold and dark. In the basic pattern of yin-yang, in the spring, yin is waning and yang is growing. Yang reaches its height in the summer and wanes in the autumn as yin grows. Yin reaches its height in the winter, and, as it wanes and yang grows, spring comes again. The cycle repeats itself with each year. A similar pattern of yin and yang is found in the smaller cycle of night and day. As a result, winter/summer and autumn/spring are not simply opposites: they are bound together in a cycle that balances the movements of yin and yang.

Dong Zhongshu, and many other thinkers, used the yin-yang theory as the basis of a cosmological interpretation of how everything in the universe worked. They hoped to understand all things as part of the balance and harmony of yin and yang. If this balance

is achieved, there will be harmony in the universe. The yin-yang theory of balance is still the basis of traditional Chinese medical thinking.

Han dynasty Confucians compiled enormous and complex lists of opposites and placed them in categories of yin and yang. Some of the pairs of opposites (with the yang coming before the yin) are as follows: heaven/earth, ruler/subject, father/son, active/passive, outer/inner, sun/moon, birth/death, giving/receiving, and male/female. The Confucians claimed these pairs of opposites, and thousands of others, were opposites in the same way as yin and yang, and thus were complementary. It is clear, however, from even this brief overview of the pairs of opposites that this is incorrect. Preference is always shown for the yang; the items under yang are things that society rewards or approves of (active, birth, ruler, and so on). Items under the yin category are seen in a more negative light (passive, death, subject). It is also clear that these pairs of opposites do not all relate to one another in the same way that yin and yang do; for example, fathers do not wax or wane in relation to a son. Finally, the most problematic part of the yin-yang theory is the assignment of gender: men are yang and birth; women are yin and death. The odd correlation of women with death and men with birth is part of the preference for yang. The yin-yang theory, accepted throughout Chinese culture, remains popular, and acted as a metaphysical basis for male superiority. It argued men and women are different but complementary to one another as yin is to yang. Men and women are different but equal.⁵

The creation of this ancient symbol buttressed men's desire to control women and keep them in their spatial confinement. On the surface, the yin-yang pairings suggest a union of the pairs, but in reality the symbol creates a spatial separation and distinct

categories of good (yang) and bad (yin). The yin is always inferior and submitting to the yang, even in the order of these pairings. The popularity of this symbol, familiar to many people in the West, maintains the “appropriate” roles and places for women. It is clear that everything yin is viewed as dangerous, mysterious, or dark in Chinese culture.

This theory also complemented the Confucian ideas that women should be separated from men and women should serve as wives, mothers, and daughters. Similarly, it supported the already patriarchal structure of the Buddhist institutions, which forced all nuns to hold a lower status than monks. As a result, in Chinese culture, the theories, symbols, and rituals that are not affiliated with any particular religious tradition are in harmony with all Chinese religions.

All of the major Chinese religions are particularly in agreement in regards to their view of sexuality, with a focus on female sexuality. All schools share the view that it is necessary for sexuality to be controlled. Buddhist and Daoist monks and nuns were required to abstain from any sexual activity. Their priests, however, could marry and have sex. The majority of the Chinese, however, do not view sex as evil. In fact, sex is a necessity for health and continuing the family line.

The handbook *Family Rituals*, written by neo-Confucian Zhu Xi (1130–1200 CE) specifies how rituals involving family members are performed. He further explains why they are performed in a particular way. He, like many before him, claim that the roles of women and men in family rituals create a balance. He illustrates how ancestral veneration should be performed at New Year, the solstice, and the full moon:

The participants, in full attire, from the presiding man on down, all enter the gate and take up their places. The presiding man faces north at the base of the ceremonial staircase. The presiding woman faces north at the base of the western steps. When the presiding man’s mother is alive, she

assumes a special place in front of the presiding woman. The wives of the presiding man's younger brothers and his younger sisters are slightly behind the wife, to her left. The wives of sons and grandsons, daughters, and female attendants are to the rear of the presiding women in rows with the most senior at the eastern end. When everyone is in place, the presiding man washes his hands, dries them, goes up the stairs, and inserts his official plaque. He opens the tablet case, takes the spirit tablets of his ancestors, and puts them in front of the case. The presiding woman washes, dries, goes up the stairs, and takes the spirit tablets of the ancestresses and sets them to the east of the men's tablets.⁶

Although the husband and wife both participate in this ritual, only men "speak" to the ancestors, and women follow the men throughout the process. Women are given specific roles, but they are certainly not roles of equal status. A woman's status is only increased by producing sons; the more and older the sons, the faster her status increases. Therefore, the woman's status is dependent on the man and the number of men in her life.

Unfortunately, the more men she has in her life, the more she will serve.

Although the wife is argued as complementary to the husband based on the yin-yang relationship, she is not the closest to her husband. For example, the neo-Confucian ritual handbooks describe the funeral ritual: "The presiding male mourner was the eldest son of the deceased; the presiding female mourner was the wife of the deceased.

However, the son was thought to have a much closer relationship to his father and other male ancestors, because they shared in the same *qi* (life energy)."⁷ A female ancestor appears on the tablet only if she is the first wife of a man or produced sons. Therefore, the status of a woman even after her death depends on her relationship with her husband and sons. Prior to marriage, a woman held very low standing and stood behind her grandmother, mother, and aunts when performing ancestral rituals. As a wife, she may hold senior status if her husband is the oldest son, and she would receive even greater

status if she had sons. Women were also obligated to lament the deaths of their husband's parents more than their own.

Marriage in traditional Chinese culture is not romantic and was arranged by the family, and most people did not see their bride or groom until their wedding day. It was very important for the parents to make sure their daughter was a virgin with a "clean" reputation. This same inactive sexual demand did not apply to sons. After marriage, women lived and became a part of the husband's family and they were expected to be obedient. There are countless stories of the husband's family working the daughter-in-law like a slave. The wife has pressure to produce sons. Thus, sex is very necessary in Chinese culture and in fact, a natural duty. Sex was only dangerous when it was considered improper. In other words, sex was dangerous when women deviated from their husband, which is underscored by the emphasis on female chastity but never male.

The spatial separation of women and men goes beyond the household. We also observe this separation in rituals. Sima Guang, a neo-Confucian, states: "In managing a family . . . what is most important is ritual. And the separation of males and females is the chief element in ritual.' He then described what this meant: men and women do not sit together or pass things directly to each other, men avoid their brother's wives, and so on."⁸

Widowhood places women in an awkward position in traditional Chinese society. Her husband's family may not care for her but want to keep her dowry. The widow may want to leave to remarry or simply to escape, but want to take her dowry with her. Confucians were aware of this complex and sensitive economic situation and proclaimed their view of how to maintain accord. Zhu Xi and his neo-Confucian school argued that

widows were to remain loyal to the memory of their husband and never remarry.

However, widows who remained loyal might be starved by their husband's family, who saw no reason why they should support an outsider or who wished to force the widow to turn over her dowry. When one neo-Confucian was asked about this situation and whether the widow might remarry, given her extreme situation, he replied, "This has come up just because people are afraid of dying of hunger and cold. Dying of hunger is a trivial matter; loss of virtue is extremely serious." Male widowers, however, were encouraged to remarry in order to continue the family line.⁹

As we can observe, a widow's status immediately decreases if she loses her husband, especially at a young age before she has a son. She is forced to never remarry, whereas a male widower would be "encouraged to remarry in order to continue the family line." Although the Confucian ideal states that a wife becomes a part of her husband's family, the reality is she is still considered an "outsider," and the husband's family sees her as a waste of their resources after their son's death. They may purposely "starve" her to "force the widow to turn over her dowry" because she cannot withstand the cruel treatment. Across traditional Chinese culture, supported by Confucianism, we see double standards. The response by the Confucian man that upholding virtue is more important than dying of hunger goes against human instinct and, frankly, he does not care because it is a winning situation for him in his male world.

Moreover, a man could divorce his wife for a number of reasons, namely the "seven conditions":

disobedience to her husband's parents, barrenness, adultery, jealousy, incurable disease, talkativeness, or theft. The man was prohibited from divorce if she had mourned his parents, if he had become wealthy or received high honours during the marriage, or if her parents were dead.

Wealthy and upper-class men did take concubines, particularly if the first wife is infertile; the first wife always remained the first wife, however, and was still in charge of the household.¹⁰

The Confucian ideals were created and upheld by men and implemented by government examinations, so the ideals were behaviors associated with prestige. These “conditions” were control mechanisms to keep women from reaching their intellectual potential and any talents they may have. Some of the conditions cannot be controlled by the individual, such as “barrenness” and “incurable disease,” which discriminate on a physical level beyond gender.

In fact, some traditional Chinese practices are brutal and create female physical disfiguration to further control women by creating an actual physical disability. Unfortunately, the men were so successful in their implementation of some of these horrible traditions that they were embraced by women and regarded as a form of high social standing. One clear example is the practice of foot-binding in traditional China, which in reality was used to control women’s sexuality. This sordid practice was first recorded in the Song dynasty (970–1279 CE), but it may have emerged even earlier. It is believed this idea was generated from the concept of taping of dancers’ feet in the Imperial Palace, but there is not a definite origin of the practice. Like the sexual attraction of breasts in the West, bound feet were regarded as sexually appealing. The smaller the feet a girl possessed, the greater the wealth the family had because it would be an indication that the family was wealthy enough that she did not have to go out to work. Families with sons would find this attractive because the family would be a privileged one to be in union with. Girls who did not bind their feet were viewed with disdain and faced a challenge in finding a husband. More importantly, perhaps, the

smaller feet made it very difficult for women, especially those from the wealthy upper class, to deviate from their husbands. For this reason, the Hakka women were viewed with disdain because they refused to bind their feet; some modern scholars label them as the first feminists in China.

There was a proverb that stated, “If you love your son, don’t go easy on his study; if you love your daughter, don’t go easy on her feet.” At about age four or five, girls’ feet were wrapped with 2 yards of bandages tightened to keep the foot from growing. The toes were bent under and into the sole of the foot, breaking the bones and bringing the toe and heel close together. The result was 3- to 5-inch feet, euphemistically called “golden lotuses.” The practice could lead to gangrene, paralysis, or death. Foot-binding was not a religious practice: no tradition is linked to its development. Some Confucian scholars argued that the practice deformed the body but most Confucians accepted the practice as a way of maintaining chastity.¹¹

The Chinese recognized they upheld an act that led to human physical deformity, but continued to let the women suffer. Examining Chinese history, the men were selfish and implemented this ritual to alleviate their own personal insecurities about the possibility of their wives straying.

Maintaining virginity or chastity applied to heterosexual activities. The Chinese overall did not feel homosexual activities affected the relationships between men and women who marry and have children. Since there was a strong spatial separation between men and women, it would not be a surprise that strong emotional, and perhaps sexual, relationships developed between men and likewise between women. Brotherhood and sisterhood were popular in traditional China. Close friends would swear oaths to

commit themselves to a lifetime friendship. It is unclear, however, if these friendships became sexual or how often sexual activities occurred between friends of the same sex. Since the gay or lesbian relationships did not interfere with traditional family functioning, the Chinese did not take time to examine them or create rules for them. In sharp contrast to traditional China attitudes, however, gay or lesbian relationships are now illegal in modern mainland China because of Communist Puritanism; however, they are not illegal in Taiwan. Taiwan is the embodiment of what many people in Taiwan view as wrong on the mainland. Most residents from China who left for Taiwan were dissatisfied with their lives on the mainland and embraced the religious flexibility and freedom Taiwan offers.

The Impositions of Proscriptions

Although Chinese women were subject to discrimination and expected to endure very harsh circumstances, they never remained passive. Instead they played active roles. One of the questions that arise with Confucian ideals is whether a woman can become a *junzi* (gentleman). In Confucian early years, they did not speak much about women's abilities to become a "gentleman." Ban Zhao (c. 45–120 CE) was one of the first women to address this issue. Ban Zhao helped her brother to write an extensive history, *Han Shu*, and then completed it after his death; she was a court historian and a well-known scholar, and was a tutor to the Empress and her advisor when the Empress became Regent. She also wrote *Nu Jie* (*Women's Instructions*) as a guide for her daughters, training them in moral behavior. Ban Zhao advocated education for women because of their important role in the inner world, which is a foundation for the outer. When discussing women's qualities, she wrote:

Women have four qualities, that is, womanly attainments, womanly speech, womanly appearance, and womanly skills. As to attainments, a woman does not have to be extraordinarily intelligent; in speech she does not need to be clever; in appearance, she does not need to be beautiful; in skill, she does not need to be more than average. Being gentle and composed, quiet, chaste and orderly, careful in what she does, and to follow the rules—this is the real womanly attainment.¹²

Ban Zhao refers to the “rules” of the Confucian classics on appropriate behavior.

Ban Zhao’s writings in general supported Confucian ideals because she argued that a woman should be “gentle and composed, quiet, chaste and orderly, careful in what she does, and to follow the rules.” She believed women should follow their fathers, then their husbands, and endure widowhood without remarriage. However, she did add her own rules on how the husband should behave in order to maintain domestic harmony. She asserted that husbands cannot physically abuse their wives because it breaks the harmony. She contended a husband who abuses his wife is acting immorally; as a result, the wife should leave her husband. Women were careful to maintain a good reputation by remaining chaste but some, like Ban Zhao, also began demanding that men treat women better. Women believed in remaining chaste and some even committed suicide when forced to forsake these “rules.” As a result, women increasingly became “ethical actors” and became their own “gentlemen.”¹³

It was mostly upper-class women who felt compelled to act as ethical actors or role models for other women. However, we can also observe this sense of responsibility among common women. For example, in *nu shu*, “women’s hidden writings,” and other texts, women in a rural area in the south part of Hunan province wrote songs, diaries, letters, histories, biographies, and poems in their own hidden form of writing. The symbols used in this writing are alphabetical, unlike Chinese characters. Women in the area were taught to read and write it, but very few men were. Women wrote to each

other, recorded their lives, wrote out prayers, and presented these writings as gifts. These women swore oaths of sisterhood to one another in pairs or groups of “sisters.” These relationships helped many women through their lives, allowing them to give each other advice as well as to complain about the families they had married into.¹⁴

These secret writings between women reflect the harsh obstacles women had to endure. Their writings also reveal their ability to not only learn a new “language,” but also to create a new system of communication and shrewdly educate other women in this new form of communication. This hidden act also served as psychological and emotional therapy for women and as a way of sharing their difficulties without interfering with the already organized Confucian system.

Women’s religious writings also reflect their overall general belief in the Buddhist concept of karma and samsara. The most central deities in women’s lives were the goddesses, and women heavily participated in the festivals and pilgrimages that honored these female deities. Prayers were a big part of their writings, and they prayed for many reasons, such as good fortune, a good husband, sons, divine help, reuniting with family members, and so forth. Rainey highlights a prayer that illustrates the arrangements a woman prepares:

Seven days ago I fasted,
Five days ago I burned incense,
Three days ago I boiled fresh water,
And washed my clothes and myself.
Today I sit peacefully in an empty room,
To write an offering to the goddess Gu Po.
I offer it to ask Gu Po’s blessing and protection.
To bring my husband safely home soon.¹⁵

Prayers were generally positioned in front of statues in temples and inscribed on fans or paper.

Women also wrote poems to spirits, particularly the ones who were unsettled. Women did not fear these spirits, and believed in an afterlife. The women believed the spirits of the dead could and would contact the living through dreams and through shamans. Despite the characterization of peasant women as “superstitious” and fearful, the women who wrote the hidden texts showed little fear of the dead and wished only to ensure that the spirits of the dead were content. As for ancestors and ancestral veneration, we very rarely find these rituals even mentioned in the hidden writings.¹⁶

Shamans or mediums, the inheritors of the office of *wu*, were extremely important for speaking with the dead. Official Confucian ritual rejected the idea of possession of the living by the spirits of the dead, and by the time of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) it was illegal for the mediums that spoke to the dead to practice. However, mediums continued to speak to the dead on behalf of the living and continue to do so into modern times. The demand that underlies the continued existence of these mediums came mostly from women, and shows us that many women were dissatisfied with Confucian ritual where male ancestors were venerated. Women turned to mediums to satisfy a need to deal directly with the dead from both the family into which they had married and their natal family. Mediums, frequently women, and their patrons, mostly women, continued their rituals for dealing with the dead despite official disapproval.¹⁷

The dominance of women who acted as shamans and mediums indicates women had an elevated spiritual status in comparison to men. Even though those who upheld Confucian ideals attempted to ban these practices and their “powers,” the “speaking to the dead” continues, and both women and men consult with these mediums. Their

continuing with their roles as mediums indicates an early rebellion of women against traditional Confucian practices and the inability of men to control women entirely.

Most women in traditional China went on pilgrimages. The lay Buddhist women yearned for more merit and took part in pilgrimages to sacred Buddhist sites. There is a large number of records of women who traveled to Mount Dai in the 1600s. During these pilgrimages, women acted as leaders, secured funds and organized the events, and made other preparations in order for the pilgrimages to take place. The purpose of a pilgrimage, one of the leaders said, was “partly to build up good fortune, partly to enjoy the sites.”¹⁸ The ritual pilgrimage, then, did not have simply a religious motive: it allowed women to travel, to see new things, to enjoy each other’s company, and, their critics claimed, to look for sexual adventures. The women held a three-day ceremony at a local temple dedicated to San Guan Da Di, the Three Agents, gods associated with heaven, earth, and water. Similarly, at the birthday of Guan Yin, the female leaders planned a three-day-and-night celebratory ceremony.¹⁹

On the surface, the pilgrimages appeared to others, such as their husbands, fathers, and sons, to be beneficial for the family because it would bring merit. Underneath this potential increase in merit, the women loved their time together and enjoyed each other’s company so much that their critics claimed they were looking for sexual adventures. These pilgrimages were a great opportunity for women who preferred same-sex sexual relationships to get away from men and experiment sexually with each other. Pilgrimages offered women one of the very few occasions to break away from their domestic confinement. Their adventures allowed them to experiment and enjoy

each other while maintaining proper appearances and even increasing their status. One of the sacred sites most often visited was Putuo Island, sacred site to Guan Yin.²⁰

Women also participated in festivals to move outside. The New Year is the first festival celebrated on the lunar calendar. This festival necessitated the worship of patrilineal ancestors, proper attire, and particular foods. Domestic rituals were performed by women. One female ritual of the New Year celebration was the veneration of the God of the Stove, or the Kitchen God, who reported the year's activities of the family to heaven. Honey was smeared on his lips to ensure a good report. The popular festival of Qing Ming falls in the third lunar month: the graves of the family were swept and cleaned. The fifth day of the fifth month is the time of the Dragon Boat Festival. Zhong Qiu, the mid-autumn or moon festival, is held on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, and so on. In the continual round of festivals, special foods were required, the patrilineal ancestors were venerated, and women were mostly responsible for the organization of the festival's rituals. The women's hidden writings record these festivals and many others, including a spring planting festival when, the night before the rice seedlings were set out, women returned to their natal home, especially women who had just married and those who had no children; they went back to their husband's homes when the rice was planted. The hidden writings tell us of many festivals that involve women meeting together in each other's homes and others where they returned to their natal homes. For example, beginning on the fifteenth day of the New Year there were women's gatherings at which women read the hidden texts together. We can see then that women organized and carried out a number of religious activities not acknowledged by the elite traditions.²¹

The “secret” records of women’s participation in festivals and activities reveal they had control over their preferences. On the surface they were able to maintain serenity and uphold their husband’s social status and save face, but in actuality the women had tremendous influence on how events took place and whether they could even occur. Since only those who know the secret code are able to access the different activities women participated in, perhaps there are numerous recordings by women but they are yet to be discovered. Much investigation is needed into the whereabouts of those who can read the code. If the language is dying, the recordings of these women will never be recovered and sealed in history.

Local deities played important roles in women’s lives, and sometimes these deities became nationally renowned, particularly from about 800 to 1100 CE. One possible reason for the rise in popularity of certain deities may have been the invention of the printing press and dissemination of books and pamphlets. Contrary to western mythology, the first printed book was the *Diamond Sutra*, printed in China in 868 CE. One of the deities that became nationally popular in this period was Guan Yin, the Bodhisattva of compassion and mercy who began in the Mahayana Buddhist traditions in India as the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara. When Guan Yin appears in China, he is a male Bodhisattva (as he remains in Tibet), but, by around the tenth century CE, Guan Yin became female in China and remains so today. Scholars have debated the reason, and it is thought that one may be the association of local female deities and their histories with the figure of Guan Yin. Eventually, it is thought, these deities and their stories became so intermeshed that Guan Yin began to be portrayed as female. Stories about Guan Yin (all outside of the Buddhist sutras) are multiple; in them she is variously portrayed as a filial

daughter, a nun, a chaste woman, or a teacher. However the change happened, Guan Yin was, and remains, the most popular deity in China. Images of Guan Yin are found not just in Buddhist temples, but also in homes, on charms, and nowadays, in taxis.

Guan Yin represented compassion, mercy, and, most importantly, she brought children. For women whose status in their husband's home depended on producing an heir, this was a central concern. Life for many women was difficult, and women who felt powerless also turned to Guan Yin. Most women had a picture, statue, or altar to Guan Yin in their rooms. Like the Virgin Mary in the Christian tradition, Guan Yin is somewhat problematic for women: along with being a compassionate and merciful deity, she is an unmarried model of filial piety and chastity, and, like Mary, impossible to imitate completely. There are reports from sociologists that modern-day devotees envy and admire Guan Yin's freedom as a woman, for she is not locked into the social structure. A pilgrim song says, "First, she does not suffer the ill-humour of in-laws; second, she does not eat food provided by a husband; third, she does not carry a son in her stomach or a grandson in her arms; fourth, she sits slightly on a lotus throne."²²

In Taiwan, Guan Yin is the most popular deity. Her freedom is held as an ideal for women. The transformation from a male to female god is significant because it reflects Chinese society's possible yearning for a mother figure. For women, in particular, Guan Yin's representation of "compassion, mercy, and most importantly she bring children" reveals the needs and obstacles women confront. The mix of envy and admiration for Guan Yin among her devotees indicates women's desire for more freedom and the possibility of becoming "an unmarried model of filial piety and chastity" like her. The pilgrim song that they sing reveals women's troubles, and that includes in-laws' "ill-

humour,” dependency on a man, having to take care of men and produce offspring, and “sitting slightly on a lotus throne.”

Along the same lines, Ma Zu, another deity, also represents compassion and mercy. Ma Zu is believed to save people from danger, especially on the sea; she also gives and protects children. One of her titles is Holy Mother of Heaven. Ma Zu is also said to have been a shy, religiously devout young woman who died young saving her father and all but one of her brothers from drowning. She is still particularly popular in southern China and in Taiwan.

In general, women were looking for gods that dealt with their specific problems: childlessness, illness, family strife, and so on. In the hidden women’s writings, we see women gathering to pray to local deities, calling them sociable names such as “honored aunt” and “Niangniang,” which means “queen” or “goddess,” and is often added to the end of the god’s name. Women prayed to these gods in their homes.

Women also would join together to journey to the Niangniang’s temple and there offer incense and gifts:

I take up my pen to write these words
 To respectfully send them to Longyantang, Yuan township,
 Where the famous Gu Niangniang manifests her spiritual power.
 Every year in the second month we look forward to all the excitement,
 Households come with incense.
 Facing the altar that keeps out wind and rain,
 With the green mountains in the background, full of colours,
 And in front, the scenery is so beautiful.
 Gu Niangniang sends down blessings . . .
 Famous Gu Niangniang, heed us well,
 And never forget your concern.
 We yearly bring you incense and count on your will.
 Gu Niangniang is profoundly good,
 And her good name is known everywhere
 Famous Gu Niangniang send down blessings;
 Receive this fragrant incense and bless us all.²³

These female deities offer comfort and alleviate women's societal anxieties. The women frequently give deities gifts such as fans, books, written prayers, and embroidery. If their prayer is answered and they have a son, they will leave red eggs and a shoe, which are gifts that indicate their appreciation for blessing them with a male heir. Women who are not having any "luck" and are not producing sons take these items home as good luck tokens.

Women in traditional China and in modern Taiwan are generally responsible for the family's divine well-being. In their homes, they frequently make offers to certain gods, such as the God of the Stove, the household gods in charge of the well or the doorway, hungry ghosts (the spirits of the dead who had no family and could cause trouble in the homes of others), and any other spirits who might cause mischief. Women offered incense, food, drink, and prayers to all of these spirits.

Women also prayed at local temples when someone was pregnant. At home, they hung pictures of tigers to encourage the birth of a son; they prayed to gods of children such as Guan Yin and Zisin Niangniang. During and just after childbirth, other prayers were offered to ensure the health and well-being of mother and child.²⁴

These rituals of offering to the spiritual world are not simply an act of propriety. Most women in Taiwan believe these gods will help them resolve their problems. In addition, the average Chinese person is superstitious and believes in good or bad luck. Tigers symbolize masculinity and are supposed to bring good luck if you want a son. It is evident at Taiwanese Buddhist temples that have statues of Guan Yin how important she is. Her images are flooded with financial donations, an indication that producing children is the most important aspect of Chinese culture. More importantly, the women worry

about the welfare of the mother and child because they are aware of the unpredictability of the birthing and child rearing process.

Women also practice exorcism to ensure the household welfare. The practice of exorcism particularly is performed during times of illness. This act was performed by sweeping the room, hanging charms, reciting mantras or sutras, and offering the spirits food. At funerals as well, women performed rituals not mentioned in the official ritual texts, so as to drive off evil spirits and preserve the health and luck of the family.

In sum, in traditional China, women played active religious roles: they initiated and organized pilgrimages to sacred sites; they organized lay associations—Buddhist, Daoist, and local—that centered on a deity and that performed good works, such as famine relief; and they continued to act as shamans or mediums. In the family setting, women performed a number of household rituals around birth, the home, and exorcism. The rituals of ancestral veneration were tied to inheritance and descent lines in the family and to official and accepted norms in the culture. In these rituals women had an essential role, but the role was always secondary and the ancestors were not hers.

It was in organized settings where women were regarded as second class citizens. Although Buddhist and religious Daoist nuns were committed to their traditions and often noted for their holiness and advice, they could not shake the predetermined status that tradition had set.²⁵ Women in traditional China participated heavily in the religious spheres but even in their religious roles, they were confined primarily within the household. The pilgrimages offer them an opportunity for freedom, but they are not an act drastic enough to permanently eradicate the obstacles they face and many do not want

to endure. Therefore, yes, women are given religious roles, but the question is: do women want to play these roles?

The Impact of Social Changes

Criticisms abound regarding the political, religious, and social systems of traditional China. Women in Taiwan have more freedom and independence today because a number of these critics let their voice be heard, including men. Two of these men are Li Ruzhen (1763–1800) and Kang Youwei (1858–1927). Li Ruzhen wrote a parody of traditional culture in his book *Jing Hua Yuan (Flowers in the Mirror)*, where men have their feet bound and their ears pierced, and where women sit for the Confucian civil service examinations. Li's switching of gender roles in his literature highlights the absurdity of established rituals, such as foot binding and piercings. His strategy hopes men will better understand the cruelty of their enforcements on women by "experiencing" those sufferings themselves. However, a serious examination of traditional culture and the status of women really began only when one of the bases of the culture, political stability, began to crack. By the 1800s it was becoming clear that the Qing dynasty could not protect China against the encroachments of western powers determined, as the German Kaiser Wilhelm said, to "carve China like a melon."²⁶ The western powers may have overstepped their boundaries by interfering with the Chinese, but in many respects they were advocates for women and brought forth a realization among both men and women that things needed to change. These foreign powers brought awareness among women that there were other perspectives and possibilities.

Another famous man, Kang Youwei, denounced certain traditional practices and contributed to the move towards greater equality among the Chinese. Kang Youwei was one of the best-known Confucians of his time and contributed to the political reform movement that attempted to reform the Qing dynasty government and make it a constitutional monarchy. He also established a “natural foot” society in 1881 aimed at ending foot binding. By then, western missionaries had also begun campaigns against foot binding and were joined by a number of the Chinese intelligentsia. Kang wrote about the Great Harmony, an ideal society in which men and women were equal. From the beginning, reform movements in China saw political and social reform as closely tied to the status of women. Critiques of traditional China throughout the twentieth century used the status of women as “proof” of the inequality and cruelty of traditional society.²⁷

Women, with the support of voiced men, educated others to eradicate the nonsensical rituals expected of women based on Confucian ideals, and still continue to voice their opinion about the ridiculousness of those practices today. Societies such as the “natural foot” society carried out the process of eliminating the cruel treatment of foot binding that women endured. In actuality, the people who forced this practice on women were murderers because they knowingly coerced women to bind their feet when they knew this act might lead to death. The ending of this malicious practice was a result of the actions of different players that crossed the boundaries of gender, cultures, and religious beliefs. The treatment of women must have been so harsh that the entire process of political and social reform in China was “tied to the status of women,” and women’s status was used to provide evidence of “the inequality and cruelty” in their society.

One historical event that showcases the active participation of reforms is the May Fourth movement. This movement began in the 1920s and was a loose conjunction of reformers that included novelists, poets, artists, journalists, and students. It was an intellectual and cultural crusade with the ideals of bringing science and democracy to a modern China. Across the wide range of reformers, Confucianism was blamed for being responsible for the decadent political situation, the backwardness of China, and the oppression of women. The slogan of the May Fourth movement was “Down with Confucius and his shop.” The most popular play of the time was Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*. Nora’s refusal to accept tradition as she slams the door on it was seen as a call for freedom from traditional culture and all that it implied toward women. Young men, who wanted to criticize filial piety as blind loyalty and family responsibilities as suffocating, argued that women were enslaved in this system. They saw no way to reform traditional Chinese culture; they wanted the whole thing scrapped.²⁸

Taiwan’s Revolt Against the “Backwardness of China”

Many people were frustrated with the “backwardness of China” because they were hopeful for the equality that democracy could bring. They also learned about scientific studies that disclosed that women, for example, are not at fault for not producing sons. Science also placed more emphasis on certain health issues. Although most marriages may have been arranged by families, the majority of husbands still wanted their wives to be healthy. If the husband does not care much for the wife, he still would want her to maintain her health because he will be responsible for her illness and making sure she recovers if she falls ill. Further, some young men found filial piety to be

“blind loyalty” because they felt their parents did not deserve any pious treatment. In some cases, the wife’s parents were much better parents to the husband than his own biological parents. As a result, some viewed this filial piety as undeserving at times and that it suffocated sons because it forced them to perform roles they may not have wanted to execute. Family responsibilities were “suffocating” for both men and women. These responsibilities forced men and women into playing certain roles. If they did not behave according to the Confucian ideal, they were viewed in a negative light. This chapter already touched on many of women’s “inside” roles, but some men despise their “outside” roles and much prefer staying “inside.” The problem with Confucian ideals was the clear gender separation and the lack of choices for both women and men. As a result, young people advocated scrapping the entire system because they knew asking for small changes would produce no change at all.

The main religious traditions were criticized as being backward, but none of the traditions were as disparaged for their treatment towards women as Confucianism was. Buddhism and religious Daoism were summarily dismissed as “superstitious.” Buddhism had contributed to the backwardness of China, the reformers argued, because it encouraged “otherworldliness” and excused social inequity as a result of karma. Religious Daoism was seen as corrupt and representative of the worst kind of superstition and non-scientific thinking. However, neither of these traditions was criticized for the views of women as much as Confucianism.²⁹

People in China clearly noted the discrimination women faced from Buddhist institutional structures. They had a problem with the Buddhists who argued women could not achieve enlightenment in their lifetime because of their female body and that

they are placed in a female body due to past actions. Further, young women and men advocated scientific thinking and anything “otherworldly” was viewed as laughable, especially in the case of Daoism.

The reform movement was also influenced by Christianity, particularly Christian missionaries. Christian missionaries came to China beginning in the mid-1800s with a mindset of cultural and racial superiority. Both Roman Catholic and Protestant missionaries insisted that anyone converting to Christianity give up all participation in rituals of ancestor veneration. This would cut converts off from most family activities. Most missionaries also confused Christianity with western culture and tended to see Christian conversion as conversion to western thinking, western ways, and western dress. Missionaries were also tarred with the brush of imperialism. So, despite the large number of missionaries, and the money and energy spent, Christianity was not very successful in China. Missionaries did, however, object to foot binding and to what they saw as the subservient status of women in China. They also opened schools for girls. They taught boys and girls their ideas about the roles of men and women and their ideas of democracy. As a result, many of the reformers of twentieth-century China—including Sun Yi Xian, considered the founder of modern China, and members of the May Fourth movement—had missionary school backgrounds. Whether Christian missions were a positive or negative influence in China is a subject still being debated, but in terms of reform, Christianity’s influence cannot be ignored.³⁰

Christianity overall was not very successful because the missionaries did not allow their beliefs to adapt to Chinese culture. The ritual of ancestor veneration is the oldest ritual known in China, and the missionaries’ demand for the Chinese to give up

this practice turned off many possible converts who may have been attracted to Christianity otherwise. On a positive note, Christianity brought many benefits to both men and women in China in terms of educational opportunities, as do other religions when they proselytize. It is generally through the means of educating “others” with their religious literature that they are able to win over new converts. These educational opportunities also included highlighting the negatives of their current systems. Although the Chinese may not have been totally convinced about Christianity, many were attracted to the ideas of equality and democracy. As a result, the reformers were believers in democracy and wanted to instill that mindset in their people.

This thinking translated to the outlook of the Chinese Communist Party. More and more women, particularly young women, took active political and social roles, organizing demonstrations and boycotts, and, from the 1930s on, taking part in guerilla warfare against the Japanese and later the Guomindang. Women were active in the Communist Party, and when the Communists took over rural areas they organized women’s unions; enacted laws that let women initiate divorce; forbade foot binding, forced marriages, and domestic violence; and established education for women.

When the Communists came to power in 1949, equality was guaranteed in the 1950 Constitution. The Marriage Law of 1950 gave women the right to abolish the dowry system, raised the status of widows, and encouraged widows to remarry. As in many communist countries, it was assumed that communism, along with women in the workforce, would bring equality. The continuation of traditional attitudes from party cadres and the general population was ignored. Although residents in Taiwan were mostly against communism, Taiwan benefitted from these changes for women.

The communist view that religion is the opiate of the people, plus its international ties, meant that all religions were persecuted and suppressed. Christian missionaries were expelled. Religious leaders of all kinds, and some of their followers, were imprisoned, tortured, or killed. Religious buildings were closed and used for other purposes. Whatever was left of most religious practices went underground. However, to protect its image, the state set up some government-controlled religious bodies. Confucianism was attacked again during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) as representative of a traditional culture that had to be destroyed.³¹

The strict Confucian rules that restricted both women and men led to the extreme of a Communist government. In particular, women wanted to eliminate all the discrimination and injustices. Their implementation of certain new laws “that let women initiate divorce; forbade foot-binding, forced marriages, and domestic violence; and established education for women” and “gave women the right to abolish the dowry system, raised the status of widows, and encouraged widows to remarry” reflect the traditions they were disgusted with and wanted to overcome. Although some may view their actions as drastic and the Communist system as negative, these changes gave women in Taiwan more freedom to live the life they desired.

Like religions that try to assert their power and eliminate other systems entirely, Communism did not eradicate Chinese religions. In fact, they have all survived and some are much stronger today than ever. Like Buddhism’s spread prior to China, Buddhism also spread from mainland China. Major Chinese religions remained vibrant in Taiwan. In China, some religious practitioners went underground; some continued to believe but did not practice. With economic reforms, which began in the late 1970s, some loosening

of restrictions occurred. In 1982, the Chinese government announced a new policy toward religions, which were to be tolerated except when criminal, counter-revolutionary, or leading to foreign “infiltration.” There are now Buddhist temples in all provinces as well as Buddhist publishers, seminaries, training centers, and lay groups. With the exception of Tibetan Buddhism, the Buddhist tradition in China seems to be making a comeback. This is particularly true in the south of China, due to influence, and money, from Taiwan. Religious Daoism has been slower to recover, though now one can find priesthood, temples, and the performance of traditional rituals such as exorcism. A training program for nuns has also begun, and men and women recite scriptures in Daoist centers. Even Protestant and Roman Catholic Christianity have grown in modern China, with their own churches, seminaries, and publishing companies. The most amazing resurgence has been in popular religiosity, with the return of some traditional funeral rituals, ancestral veneration, and a large number of texts now available across China. It is now possible for women in China to practice their traditions, whether popular, Buddhist, Daoist, or Christian, as either a layperson or a religious professional. It is important to note the status of women in China today because although Taiwan has a different government system, the two are more in contact now than ever in terms of frequent travels, business relationships, and even marital affairs and marriage.

However, religious practice is still not completely tolerated. The recent persecution of Falun Gong, a new version of popular religiosity mixing traditional beliefs with the practice of meditation and qigong (a series of physical exercises), shows the government’s fear of large and organized religious groups. Both male and female Falun Gong followers have been imprisoned, tortured, or killed.³²

Even though the Communist regime took power, like Christian missionaries, it was unable to eradicate the religions and religious practices that fulfilled so many people. These practitioners either practiced in secret or migrated to other lands where the practices were accepted. In recent years, however, there seems to be more religious freedom in China, but only if the religious groups are not viewed as a threat to the governing leaders. The government thought Falun Gong overstepped its boundaries, and as a result, many of their members faced imprisonment and even death.

Confucian ideas are still present in the Chinese psyche. Unlike the Communist system, which tried to obliterate Confucian ideals entirely, Taiwan tries to incorporate only the positive attributes of Confucian thought and use them to support science and democracy. Some Taiwanese scholars argue the Confucianism that was practiced in traditional China was not the real Confucianism: arbitrary power, authoritarianism, and the low status of women actually run counter to real Confucianism. The “New Confucians,” led by scholars such as Du Weiming, maintain that Chinese culture cannot function without Confucianism, for it is Confucianism that provides the moral base for Chinese society. It is in this context that women have also begun to investigate the Confucian tradition, asking the perennial question: Can a woman be a Confucian gentleman? Some have argued that Confucianism can and does include women. For example, one argument was women can be equal partners in a family that practices mutual deference, mutual authority, and mutual respect. It is argued that if one returns to the Confucian classics and takes from them the notions of respect and mutual responsibility, one can overturn the authoritarian interpretation. The senior partner in relationships, a husband or father, is not permitted to act cruelly or immorally, and it is

the right of partners in relationships to speak about injustice. When looking at Confucianism in this way, one scholar argues, “Confucianism cherishes at its heart, equality in education and the *li* (principle) of change. These two principles, an equal opportunity to learning and an attitude of openness and flexibility, do not contradict feminism.” For some scholars, a “real” Confucianism can be recovered.³³

Any system, whether political, religious, or a conglomerate of both, has those who support it and those who abhor it. Further, most texts that support a particular system contain information that can be viewed as conflicting, whether they are the Confucian classics, Buddhist sutras, or the Bible. The return to looking at the Confucian classics in a positive light is a backlash against Communism and is supported by those who view Communism from a negative perspective. Instead of coming up with an alternative system that is completely new, those who were unfulfilled by Communism probably felt it would be easier to resurrect Confucianism by highlighting the aspects that would support their agenda and needs, such as the principles that “do not contradict feminism.”

This proposal of New Confucians endured many critical attacks in Taiwan. For example, Xui Lian Annette Lu, a contemporary Taiwanese feminist and former Vice President of Taiwan, began a feminist critique of Confucianism. She argued that Confucianism speaks only to men, equates maleness and being human, and sees women as second-class human beings.³⁴

In mainland China, the 1988 television documentary *River Elegy* argued that Chinese civilization is dead and stifling, and that much of this is due to Confucianism. In practical terms, it can be argued that the vast majority of people agree. Family strictures, especially as they affect women, have begun to loosen, if slowly. Ancestral veneration

has often been abandoned; it may be practiced only for form's sake; or, in some cases, women have transformed it. There is growing anecdotal evidence that women are beginning to perform ancestral veneration rituals for their own parents and to follow matrilineal descent lines when doing so. In Taiwan, I have seen women, and their husbands, venerating the plaques of her parents. This was explained as being due to the social dislocation of the civil war and the move from China to Taiwan, but the fact that it happened at all is dramatic.³⁵

Most people on the island of Taiwan arrived on the island as immigrants because they were unhappy with a previously imposed system. The people in Taiwan are able to examine the situations of other lands from afar and view the systems "outside of the box." Lu's arguments against Confucianism are valid because Chinese history has proven that these traditional Confucian ideals have castigated women and often placed them in dangerous positions. Also, it makes absolute sense for a daughter and son-in-law to venerate the matrilineal ancestors and respect the wife's parents as much as the husband's.

Further, as an outside examiner with a history of foreign influences, Taiwan residents have the flexibility to incorporate aspects of different systems that they embrace and ignore the principles they believe are non-applicable to them. As a result, although Buddhism may have had an institutional hierarchy that gave preference to men, when Buddhism entered Taiwan, it had to adapt and the people in Taiwan did not tolerate most of the discriminatory practices. In fact, the Buddhist monastic and lay communities in Taiwan strive to be unique and be an example for others to follow.

Taiwan in general is accepting of all practices as long as certain groups do not force others to participate. As Rainey says, “Even in Taiwan, where traditional Chinese thought has dominated, changes are found. In 1989, Taiwan legalized the practice of shamans and there is now an association of shamans, the vast majority of whom are women.”³⁶ When one looks at religiosity in Chinese communities outside of China, one can see that many new ideas from the surrounding cultures are being brought into traditional thinking and practice. A small, but telling, example is the wearing of a white bridal dress. White has always been the traditional color of mourning, worn at funerals.³⁷ However, in modern Taiwan, most brides wear a white bridal gown. Afterwards, they change into two or three other gowns at the reception, one of which is usually red because it is the traditional wedding color. Some brides in Taiwan never wear a red gown at all. Moreover, the younger generations may not even practice ancestor veneration at their weddings. Many who perform the rituals are only acting to appease their parents and relatives.

Women in Taiwan find themselves in peculiar situations because of this deeply entrenched history of Confucian ideals. As new social structures and ways of thinking transform traditional practice, women find themselves in odd situations. The only way to reform Confucian ritual is through changing everyday practice and the ideal of family based on the patrilineal line; this would require a very strong initiative from a large number of women. Modern women in Taiwan have taken one of three routes their mothers and grandmothers took: they go along with tradition; they abandon the tradition altogether; or they privately change the tradition to suit themselves. It is important to note that Confucianism cannot just be ignored. Dealing with Confucianism is a pressing

issue in that Confucian notions permeate thought about gender, law, society, and religiosity.³⁸

To end the discriminatory practices against women caused by Confucianism in Taiwan, women must band together and must abandon these rituals altogether. They clearly cannot “go along with tradition” because this response indicates acceptance. If women accept being discriminated against, most likely the discriminatory practices will not only continue but increase. They should not “privately change the tradition to suit themselves” because although it is better than to “go along with tradition,” it allows men to overtly maintain their superior status. The male psyche needs to comprehend and accept women can be their equals. By secretly changing tradition, women may gain some freedom but the reality is men will still maintain that they are superior, and don’t women deserve openly equal status?

Throughout Taiwan and other regions where Buddhist institutions exist, it is easy for women to locate leaders in Buddhism and to target them to achieve change. Although not all Buddhist monks and laypeople may support women’s ability to achieve enlightenment, there are certainly Buddhist texts and examples of influential women in the Buddhist canon that support Buddhist nuns and laywomen who believe they can achieve enlightenment and provide textual evidence and principles that lay the foundation for their new Buddhist schools.

CHAPTER 4

Buddhist Renaissance in Taiwan

In the past 50 years, fully ordained nuns and monks of the Mahayana tradition have been ordaining Buddhist laywomen in Taiwan and around the world who want to attain nun status. Fully ordained nuns compose approximately 75 percent of the Buddhist monastic community in Taiwan. How did Buddhist nuns in Taiwan achieve such an unprecedented status and large population? To understand how nuns became empowered in Taiwan, we must take a closer look at the religious movements in Taiwan's recent history and the women who made sacrifices in order to make female empowerment in society a reality.

While the People's Republic of China was trying to eradicate religious practices during the Cultural Revolution,¹ Taiwan was experiencing a proliferation of Chinese religious and philosophical traditions.² The status of women in Taiwan has changed drastically in the past decades. The number of women in Taiwan who are highly educated, focus on their own career outside of the home, and have fewer children have all increased. In 1987 women yielded 50 percent of the total high school population, whereas in 1958 only about one-third of the high school population was female.³ Similarly, in 1987 every 37 out of 100 women worked outside of the home, whereas only 14 percent worked outside of the home in 1958.⁴

Religious practices thrived in conjunction with the industrialization and modernization of Taiwan in the 1970s and 1980s. Taiwan has used a part of its economic wealth to support and expand its religious communities. For example, the number of temples in Taiwan increased 113 percent between 1956 and 1980.⁵ This rapid

industrialization was in part due to the sacrifices made by many women who were willing to take on work with very low earnings. The majority of these women was young and employed by the manufacturing sector, which has tremendous success in the exportation of goods abroad.

These young women were determined to change their lives and were willing to endure harsh labor, which placed women outside of the home. Many women began to balance work and family, which led directly to a decrease in the number of children they produced. The fertility rate in 1987 was approximately 66% less than the fertility rate in 1958.⁶

The working women, in addition to their economic influence, also brought about changes in the syncretic religious arena. More women placed themselves outside of the home and some practices of ancestor worship disappeared in their families. Scholars such as Yu Tehui and Wang Yulin contend these cases of disappearance foreshadow a possible rejection of other domestic roles traditionally prescribed for women: “Although ancestors are the foundation of the Chinese mind, it is doubtful whether we can still maintain the idea of reverence for ancestors while the rituals of ancestor worship disappear day by day.”⁷

Women in Taiwan are influenced by the traditions many of their family members uphold, outside influences such as those introduced by the West, and their own desire to evaluate their current circumstances. Taiwan as a whole struggles with its identity because it is strongly influenced by the West but also holds deeply rooted social values from the Nationalists who arrived in Taiwan from mainland China in 1949. Therefore, there are different factions in Taiwan that advocate distinct political agendas.

The majority of women in Taiwan find Chinese Buddhism the most attractive religious choice. Daoism plays a less significant role because the main role in Daoism is played by the priests when they perform certain popular religion rituals. Chinese Buddhism, however, is not a separate religious entity because its practices incorporate elements from Confucianism, Daoism, and folk religions as well.⁸

Buddhism in general is more flexible and can be argued as favoring female equality, particularly in the Mahayana tradition. Women must either change the thinking of the particular school of temple to which they belong or simply develop their own.⁹ The majority of Mahayana practitioners believe women can achieve enlightenment in their lifetime and believe in the education of female monastics and laypeople. In Taiwan, in particular, the nuns go further than the belief that women can achieve Buddhahood. Nuns and monks in Taiwan take an active role to ensure the nuns' lineages survive by ordaining women from around the world, regardless of whether the monastic and lay communities in their countries will recognize them. For example, Dharma Master Zheng Yan, a Buddhist nun in Taiwan, founded the Buddhist Compassion, Belief, Love, and Mercy Foundation (also known as Ci Ji Foundation in Chinese). In the early 1960s, she became convinced that women could take on the same religious responsibilities as men and sought out a Dharma Master who agreed with her and ordained her. In 1966 she set up her own foundation, which has grown to a membership of 4 million people. They provide medical, financial, or spiritual aid to anyone in need. In the 1999 Taiwan earthquake, they were the first on the scene, just as they were after an earthquake in Mexico. The foundation has offered medical services and distributed food from Haiti to Thailand. It runs free hospitals, senior homes, medical training colleges, and schools.

Zheng Yan rejects many of the traditional rituals and beliefs of Buddhism and has, in essence, founded a new school of Buddhism that is socially active and sees itself as returning to the basics of Buddhism. Her followers say that she is a reincarnation of the Buddha.¹⁰ This idea itself reveals the progressive environment in Taiwan because not only do they support the idea of women achieving enlightenment in their lifetime, some of them regard a living woman as the “reincarnation of the Buddha.”

Buddhist nuns in Taiwan like Dharma Master Zheng Yan serve on an international level. They establish foundations and organizations that help improve world conditions and relieve suffering. In doing so, they gain the respect of different communities and from both men and women. More importantly, many people depend on these foundations and organizations. Zheng Yan rejects the discriminatory practices against women of traditional Buddhist institutions but embraces aspects that she advocates in her new Buddhist school.

Zheng Yan is not the only example of an influential nun in Taiwan. Others, including laywomen, have maintained their argument that women can achieve buddhahood and have the ability to be prominent teachers and leaders. There are both advantages and disadvantages of Buddhism’s lack of central organization. The lack of central organization allows women to forge their own path but this can work against women as well because there may not be a central body to legislate the changes women want.

Buddhist monks may continue to reject Zheng Yan’s views; the neighbors may look askance at women who venerate their natal family’s ancestors. Fundamentalism, as we understand it in the West, does not, strictly speaking, exist in Chinese culture.

Fundamentalism, associated with the exclusivist belief in the literal truth of a text, the *Quran* for example, is not found in traditions such as Confucianism or Buddhism. There is, though, a broader use of the term *fundamentalism* to mean an unswerving belief in a tradition, a demand for purity of practice, and, often nostalgia for the past. One can find some of this, especially in more conservative Chinese communities such as in Taiwan. In Taiwan, all-male Confucian groups still understand Confucianism in traditional terms and blame the problems of modern society on those who would change or abandon Confucianism as they see it. Similarly, there are Buddhist monks and laypeople who reject any change in tradition. Ordinary people too may worry that radical changes in tradition will lead to a loss of the essentials of Chinese culture.

For 50 years the Communists in China attempted to eradicate religiosity, and were spectacularly unsuccessful. Since restrictions were lifted, popular practice, Buddhism, religious Daoism, and Christianity have all revived, which was contributed by those outside of the mainland. But the experience of the twentieth century has changed these traditions irrevocably. Exposure to other cultures, rethinking of the traditions, and a reassessment of the roles of women has seeped into Chinese culture. The traditions are changing, even if only slowly and bit by bit. This is a trend that will continue.¹¹

In Taiwan there are four Buddhist teachers who are compared to the “Guardians of the Four Directions.” These teachers, their Buddhist institutions, and “directions” are:

North (Jinshan): Master Sheng Yan of Dharma Drum Mountain

South (Gaoxiong): Master Xing Yun of Fo Guang Shan

East (Hualian): Master Zheng Yan of the Ci Ji Foundation

West (Nantou): Master Wei Jue of Zhong Dai Shan

Many of these have been shaped by the influences of the Humanistic Buddhism of Master Yin Shun, which has become a distinctive characteristic of Taiwanese Buddhism. Yin Shun was influenced by Taixu, who is rarely mentioned in the history of Buddhism in Taiwan. Humanistic Buddhism integrates people's spiritual practices into their daily lives and is considered a modern Buddhist philosophy mostly advocated by Mahayana Buddhists. These Buddhist institutions possess branches around the world and are now encouraging the resurgence and spread of Buddhism in mainland China.¹²

History of Buddhism in Taiwan

As discussed briefly in the Introduction, Buddhism was brought to Taiwan by settlers in the Fujian and Guangdong Provinces during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). The Dutch colonial rulers controlled Taiwan for nearly four decades from 1624 to 1663 and strongly discouraged Buddhist practices. In 1663, Zheng Cheng Gong (Guoxingye) forced the Dutch out of Taiwan and the first Buddhist temple was built by his son, Zheng Jing. In 1693, the Qing dynasty seized control of Taiwan because they overpowered Jing Ning, Zheng Jing's son. At this time, many monks from Fujian and Guangdong provinces came to Taiwan to establish temples, and various Buddhist cults grew and prospered. It was not until the nineteenth century that Buddhist monasticism arrived.

Taiwan was a Japanese colony from 1895 to 1945, and most of the Buddhist temples in Taiwan affiliated themselves with one of the following central temples:

North (Jilong): Yueh Mei Mountain, founded by Master Shan Hui

Center (Miaoli): Fa Yun Temple, founded by Master Jue Li

South (Tainan): Kai Yuan Temple, also founded by Jue Li¹³

Under Japanese control, Taiwan's Buddhism became strongly influenced by Japanese Buddhism. Temples underwent pressure and scrutiny to connect with the Japanese lineages and there was confusion regarding the distinctions between Buddhist and Daoist temples. Chinese folk religion was prohibited because the Japanese government considered popular religious practices as a protest against their rule. The Japanese made an effort to institute married priesthood like in Japan, but failed. The stress on clerical celibacy and vegetarianism was also considered a protest and viewed with disdain by the Japanese.

During World War II, Japan was defeated and Jiang Jieshi's government took control of Taiwan. Many mainland Chinese, including monks, fled with Jiang's military in 1949. These monks were recipients of privileged treatment by the new administration. Buddhist institutions at this time were controlled by the Chinese Buddhist Association, which was controlled by the government. This association was founded originally in 1947 in Nanjing and was under the control of mainland monks. The authority of the Chinese Buddhist Association began to decrease in the 1960s because the government allowed independent Buddhist organizations; it lifted martial law in Taiwan in 1987.

A number of prominent Buddhist figures arose in Taiwan, including many women. One of the first independent Buddhist organizations was founded by Xing Yun. Xing gained popularity from radio broadcasts in the 1950s. Zheng Yan, as mentioned before, was a prominent Buddhist nun ordained by Yin Shun who established Ci Ji, considered the most highly regarded charity organization in Taiwan. She serves not only as a great example of the image of a female Buddhist nun, but also as a representative of the Buddhist Sangha. Ci Ji, in fact, is praised and more dependable to many people in

Taiwan than the government. The organization is in charge of many hospitals in Taiwan and carries out efforts for world relief. For example, in 1999, there was an earthquake in Puli; the victims and their relatives highly praised Ci Ji for their quick and effective response and were upset at the government for not responding promptly.

In the 1980s, Buddhist leaders made great efforts to convince the Minister of Education in Taiwan to allow the establishment of Buddhist organizations. They were ultimately successful, and the 1990s saw the establishment of a number of Buddhist universities. This was made possible by the “miracle economy” that Taiwan experienced during that era. These Buddhist universities were connected with a particular Buddhist leader and include Dharma Drum Buddhist College, Fo Guang University, Huaan University, Xuan Zang University, Nanhua University, and Ci Ji University. The Ministry of Education, however, forbids colleges and universities from requiring a particular religious belief. Master Xin Dao of Lin Jiushan also opened the Museum of World Religions in Taipei in 2001. The museum exhibits ten different world religions and features “Avatamsaka World,” a representation depicting the Avatamsaka Sutra.¹⁴

The Interior Ministry offers statistics that illustrate the growth in Taiwan’s Buddhist population from 800,000 in 1983 to 4.9 million in 1995. This 600 percent increase highlights the proliferation Buddhism has experienced in the past two decades. During this time, the number of registered Buddhist temples increased from 1,157 to 4,020, almost a 400 percent increase.¹⁵ David Eastwood provides similar statistical information. He states government statistics claimed that in 1990 there were 4.8 million Buddhists (about 20% of the population) and around 2,000 priests in Taiwan. In 2004 the government gave a figure of 5.5 million Buddhists, compared with 0.6 million Protestant

Christians.¹⁶ Buddhism has been growing in popularity but it is hard to say how many Buddhists there really are in Taiwan because these numbers include many people who regularly contribute funds to organizations without any real interest in their Buddhist teaching. For example, in 1998 Ci Ji claimed around 4 million members, of which only 7,000 participated in its activities.¹⁷

Buddhist associations are found on most university campuses. There are eight Buddhist universities and colleges and three main Buddhist hospitals, and cable TV has a few channels devoted to Buddhist teaching. There are also 28 registered Buddhist publishing houses and over 4,000 registered Buddhist temples (compared to around 3,500 registered Protestant churches). These are all signs that Buddhism is impacting Taiwanese society.¹⁸

The Buddhist ideas of detachment from the world and monastic living clashed with the Confucian ideals of filial duty and producing sons. As a result, Buddhism in Taiwan evolved to fit the needs of society. The outcome was the formulation or reformulation of new schools of Buddhism. Two of these most popular schools are Pure Land Buddhism and Chan Buddhism (known as “Zen” by many in the West).

Pure Land Buddhism is compatible with the popular practices of Chinese folk religions because it incorporates the Daoist interest in magic and spiritual powers. Eastwood explains the distinctive characteristics of Pure Land Buddhism. He elaborates that this form of Buddhism believes in the idea of a Pure Land, a western paradise comparable to the idea of heaven, which can be entered through faith in Buddha. There is no idea here of the extinction of Nirvana as in more traditional Buddhism. Its stress on the equality of all people makes this form of Buddhism more appealing to the grass roots

Chinese. Pure Land Buddhism has a strong emphasis on moral teaching and basic social virtues, which overlaps with Confucianism.¹⁹

Chan Buddhism, on the other hand, focuses on meditation that is able to generate instant enlightenment. Chan Buddhism has no emphasis on a concept of heaven, chanting the name of the Buddha, or moral teaching. Aspects of this type of Buddhism known in the West include the development of physical skills and meditation on paradoxes. Chan has encouraged practitioners to become highly skilled at physical tasks. The idea is that when one masters a physical task to the point that it may be done without thinking, then a deeper awareness of surrounding reality may be achieved. This is the background to the famous gong fu skills of China's Shaolin monks and the 1974 book, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* by Robert M. Pirsig. Meditation on paradoxes such as the famous "What is the sound of one hand clapping?" is used to jar the mind loose from the bondage of language and enable deep mystical insights into the meaning of meaning.²⁰

When people in Taiwan encounter a situation where Buddhism and traditional Chinese values are in conflict, they generally interpret Buddhism in terms of Chinese culture and not the other way around. This evolution of Buddhism has made Buddhism extremely popular in Taiwan. In fact, there are more Buddhist temples per capita in Taiwan than anywhere else in the world. However, Buddhist notions of reincarnation and the Four Noble Truths are only one of the many aspects that make up the average person's view of the afterlife in Taiwan.

Buddhism in Taiwan strongly emphasizes charitable acts and contributing to and being involved in society. This emphasis is not surprising since Taiwan's Buddhist

monastic community is mostly female and women in Buddhist history largely played roles that educated and alleviated the sufferings of others in society. Buddhists in Taiwan involve themselves heavily in humanitarian works that provide relief, such as in the medical field. This emphasis, matched with strong organizers and organizations that execute these relief projects, has earned generous donations from many benefactors, even donors who do not consider themselves Buddhists, because they have great confidence in the works of these organizations. Instruction in Buddhist teachings also actively involves the community at large. There are small groups that meet locally, and Buddhist conferences that bring speakers to Buddhist universities. These organizations have also extended their education via popular media through complimentary magazines and newsletters, radio, and television. Buddhist groups in Taiwan are extremely careful about who they select to represent them and strategically hire top professionals to take on management positions. These strategies have contributed to the positive image Buddhism holds in Taiwan and abroad.

Buddhism is continuing to grow in Taiwan, and the effectiveness of Taiwan's Buddhist organizations extends beyond the island; evidence of its influence can be seen worldwide, particularly among women. About half a century ago, the people in Taiwan looked towards the West for a form of progressive Buddhism that fit their modernized lifestyle, but Taiwan has achieved its own progressive Buddhism. These Buddhist institutions appreciate the exchange of ideas and have sent priests to study and earn doctorates from universities in the West. Another strength of Buddhist groups in Taiwan is their ability to employ media and information technology and adapt to new ideas, trends, and technology. With their progressiveness, innovativeness, and tendency to

adapt, it is not surprising that “Taiwan is the only Asian country where ordination of women as Buddhist nuns is fully accepted and as a result women play a prominent role in Taiwan’s Buddhism.”²¹

The following are three remarkable Buddhist organizations that have relieved the sufferings of and impacted many people worldwide:

Fo Guang Shan (Buddhist Mountain of Light School)

Founded by Master Xin Yum with the aim of spreading Buddhism worldwide, they now have 100 chapters in 60 countries. This has been described as “humanistic” Buddhism where followers are directed towards the suffering of people in the world and participation in concrete social welfare activities to relieve suffering.

Ci Ji Foundation

Founded by the Buddhist Nun Master Zheng Yan who in 1996 was nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize. Ci Ji is involved in charity work in Nepal, Thailand and North Korea. It is noted for its response to disasters around the world and is very prominent in Taiwan. Ci Ji runs a 750-bed hospital in Hualien, the largest hospital in Eastern Taiwan. Ci Ji is a global organization with 78 offices in the United States and over 4 million supporters worldwide.

Dharma Drum Mountain (DDM)

This organization was founded for the spread of Chan Buddhism. It is in the process of building a Buddhist global education complex that will include a research center, a university, a monastery, a museum, and an international conference hall. The organization is also known for its emphasis on environmental protection and reduction of waste in daily life.²²

The above mentioned are only a few of the larger, more well-known Buddhist organizations established in Taiwan that have positively impacted the world. The fact that many people in Taiwan trust some of these organizations more than their government’s organized efforts indicates how much the people in Taiwan trust these Buddhist institutions.

Buddhism has worked with Chinese folk religion, and most Buddhists also believe in the many practices and gods from Chinese folk religion. Chinese folk religion,

likewise, has incorporated some Buddhist concepts and gods into its belief system. People in Taiwan believe in a huge range of gods, who are arranged in a hierarchal structure similar to real living members of society in the ancient Chinese court. Folk religion holds a mix of old practices of ancestor worship, offerings to ghosts and other spiritual beings, employment of spiritual mediums, and temple worship. Folk religion practitioners also organize most of the main festivals celebrated in Taiwan. In Taiwan, most people do not view syncretism as a problem. The name of the religion is not very important to them. What matters most is what fulfills their life and what they consider to be truths from these categorized religions. Eastwood hypothesizes that one of the roots of this confusion may lie in the Japanese attempt to suppress Chinese religions during the 50 years they governed Taiwan. During this time, to prevent closure, many folk temples installed Buddhist statues and called themselves Buddhist temples. In many homes today it is common to see a Buddhist statue alongside the ancestor tablets with pictures of folk gods in the background. This syncretism makes it hard to define who is a true Buddhist in Taiwan.²³ Although it is true that folk temples may have added Buddhist statues during Japanese rule to appear as Buddhist temples, I disagree with Eastwood's argument that this syncretism is based on a "confusion." The Chinese clearly were not confused when they incorporated Buddhist statues to save folk religion. Further, most people in Taiwan are educated and aware of how Buddhism was brought into Taiwan and the basic concepts and gods of Buddhism. Similarly, they have a firm grasp of the gods and practices of folk religion. This syncretism is not confusion but a choice made by people in Taiwan. Taiwan has experienced various influences and is an island with residents who are mostly immigrants with different backgrounds. In fact, for some, Taiwan was

not the only place they immigrated to, and it is perfectly appropriate for them to pick and choose what works for them from various religious encounters. Further, this syncretism defines a “true Buddhist in Taiwan,” not making it difficult to “define who is a true Buddhist,” as Eastwood states. Syncretism is a part of what makes Buddhism true for people in Taiwan.

It is this ability for Buddhism to adapt and mix with the multifaceted culture in Taiwan that has enabled its survival. In fact, Buddhism has done better than survive in Taiwan. It has prospered, and one could argue it has been molded into the strongest form of Buddhism thus far in world history. The reason Taiwan’s Buddhism is strong is because it continues to exchange ideas with the outside world. Its adherents set out not to impose only their ideas and beliefs but also to continue to learn from others. This receptiveness has contributed to Buddhism’s growth in popularity and includes involvement in society and politics, the propaganda of meditation as a way of health and well-being without a direct religious promotion, and an assertive passion for their cause. Many Buddhist organizations throughout Taiwan coordinate retreats that focus on experiencing meditation. These retreats are likely the type that the average person in Taiwan would like to take part in. These practices allow individuals to select religious practices and beliefs that benefit them personally without feeling the pressure to affiliate with a particular religious organization and all its practices and beliefs. In many ways, the new Buddhism in Taiwan strongly resembles the New Age teaching in the West in this respect.

Modernizing and Popularizing the Buddhist Image

Currently, Buddhist organizations in Taiwan are working on modernizing and popularizing the Buddhist image. They have tremendous financial resources, and most of the donations they receive are spent on education, medical and social work in Taiwan and worldwide. With the economic opportunities at hand to positively impact different communities around the world, it is no wonder Taiwan is recognized as an important center for the Buddhist world mission. Some people in Taiwan may not know the specifics regarding Buddhism's philosophical teachings, but they do consider these teachings "local" and give Buddhist ideas and gods significant meaning in their lives. On the other hand, Christianity is considered "foreign." As a result, most people in Taiwan have incorporated Buddhist practices and beliefs into their concepts of life and the afterlife. Taiwanese Buddhist organizations' focus on modernization with a special focus on the ability of women to achieve enlightenment and lead relief efforts are giving Taiwan an outstanding reputation and making Taiwan a special place for women around the world.

Numerous women outside of the monastic community have also risked their lives to improve women's standing in Taiwan's society by criticizing Confucianism's patriarchal structure and moral deficiency. To recognize just one, previously mentioned Xui Lian Annette Lu, a Taiwanese scholar who attended Harvard University, spoke out against many of the sexist male-dominated traditions that Taiwanese mainstream society upholds. The government was so infuriated at her criticism against Confucian traditions and her political activities that they imprisoned her. She stood by her beliefs and never backed down.²⁴

Xui Lian Annette Lu and the Critics Against Confucian Traditions

Annette Lu eloquently recorded her criticism in published form for all subsequent generations to view. As a highly educated person who works as an attorney and political activist, Lu is disconcerted about the discrimination women continue to face in Taiwan's democratic society. The response she receives on a frequent basis is: "But this is a tradition of thousands of years!"²⁵ She correctly points out that the Chinese take great pride in holding strong traditions. Many Chinese speak of their seven-thousand-year history. Lu shrewdly highlights that, in retrospect, some Chinese traditions are utterly ridiculous. For example, she stresses the binding of women's feet was both harmful and pointless. In her *New Feminism*, Lu presents a history of women in Chinese society from the Han dynasty (206 BCE to 220 CE) through contemporary Taiwan. She illustrates women as dependent on men in the Han dynasty, playing subservient roles in positions serving men. She argues in Confucianism, humanity equates to men; women are second-class beings, which echoes Janice Willis' description of women during Shakyamuni's time.

Lu asserts that the most detrimental aspect of Confucianism is its encouragement of the male lineage.²⁶ Families want to increase their status and continue their family line by having sons. Male heirs are viewed as necessary. In fact, it is not uncommon for women to be beaten for not producing a male heir even today, which is ridiculous considering the sex of the child is determined by the husband. Parents would treat their daughters-in-law who had sons in a much more favorable manner than those who only produced daughters. They frequently openly disdained daughter-in-laws who produced no children. Many believe only sons are permitted to execute ancestral rituals and

funeral rites to allow their ancestors to live a harmonious afterlife. If there are no male descendants, many believe the ancestors will suffer as hungry ghosts. The Confucian mindset upholds: “There are three things which are unfilial, and to have no posterity is the greatest of them,”²⁷ meaning having no male descendants is the greatest misfortune for a family.

This Confucian tradition, which has been long instilled in mainstream society in Taiwan, imparts fear among families that they may not bear a son. As a result, there is still a strong preference to have boys rather than girls, as girls are seen more as a burden and a member of the family that the parents will eventually have to give away.

Husbands, unfortunately, also may treat their wives in a discriminatory manner because they view them as “tools” to produce sons. This fear is not only in the male psyche—most women in Asian societies also prefer their child to be male, particularly if it is their first child. Some men and women may not actually prefer sons, but may argue that they feel relieved if their first child is male because then their parents will stop demanding a male heir. Lu shares her encounter with one woman who wanted only sons because they are the only ones that continue the family name.²⁸ This view, unfortunately, is common across Asia and beyond.

Women are at a strong disadvantage because of the preference for males, leading to their lower status and less opportunities. Even in some wealthy families, parents do not feel it is necessary to provide their daughters with educational opportunities. They do not think there is a point to spending money on a daughter they will need to marry off. In fact, they hope she will be married off. In many cases, parents order their daughters to work at a young age at some menial job to produce income to support their sons’ future

endeavors. Even worse, daughters are expected to pay back their biological parents for raising them when they are welcomed into their husband's family. The emphasis placed on continuing the male lineage or family line forces women into certain roles that allow very little flexibility.

This patriarchal tradition is the root of women's suffering in Taiwan, according to Lu. To eliminate the preference for sons and the devaluing of daughters, the government should allow children to assume their mother's surname in place of their father's. Although at first reluctant, Taiwan changed its family law to permit a child to take on the mother's surname in 1987 under two conditions: the mother must not have any brothers and the husband must approve this proceeding.²⁹

Lu takes this concept one step further and argues that women should not change their last name and assume the "Mrs." title when they enter into marriage. Since men do not change their title and last name, this movement, or rather lack of movement, would move towards equality among the sexes. Further, the practice of dowries should be completely eliminated because women should not be treated along the same lines as cattle for sale.³⁰

Many women in Taiwan hold similar perspectives and are not holding them back. One mother shared with anthropologist Elaine Tsui her response to a complaint from her daughter's sister-in-law that the dowry offered was too small: "Do you know how much it costs to get a bachelor's degree? Besides, my daughter makes NT \$500,000 a year for your family. How could the face value of your own dowry match the total amount of her potential earnings in the future?"³¹

The mother's comment reflects her support for her daughter's education and a mother's defense of her daughter's strengths. We can also sense a bit of resentment on the part of the mother because she wants her son-in-law's family to appreciate her daughter and feels her daughter is worthy of respect. However, it is still disturbing that the mother bases her daughter's value partially on her salary and accepts this dowry system.

The "three submissions and four virtues" of Confucian philosophy, which are deeply ingrained in Taiwanese society, are obstacles women need to overcome to achieve equality. "The 'three submissions' is a magical spell comparable to the demon-subduing spell of the legendary Monkey King: it makes women take submission as their reason for living from birth until death. It makes women into the shoes underneath men's feet."³²

Ban Zhao (d. 116 CE) in *Instructions for Women*, a Confucian text, as discussed briefly already, proposes her "four virtues" for the ideal woman: "feminine virtue, feminine work, feminine deportment, and feminine speech."³³ These virtues force women to act or be stupid, meek, and dutiful.³⁴ These "virtues" place women not only in low positions but also positions in which they can never speak out and defend themselves. These ideals progressed into even worse predilections. For example, at the end of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) it was a common saying in mainstream society that "the lack of talent is a virtue in a woman."³⁵ In other words, the dumber and more submissive the woman, the better. Many modern women in Taiwan are disgusted by this perspective and argue that women should exercise all their talents and reach their full potential.

Another battle women in Taiwan need to fight is the spatial placement of the woman “inside.” The *Li ji* also presents the ideal spatial separation for men and women: “Men don’t speak of domestic matters and women don’t speak of outside matters. Domestic conversations do not leave the home and discussions of the outside world do not enter the home.”³⁶ These different realms confine women within the home, which can lead to psychological and emotional abuse by her husband. Under this ideal, it would be glaringly inappropriate for a woman to even seek help from or in the “outside world.”

Abstinence from sexual intercourse is another quality valued by traditional Confucianism that is imposed on women only. Women, whether they are daughters, wives, or widows, are considered more ideal if they remain chaste. This partiality for female chastity was even reflected in Chinese law. Unlike men who could remarry, Emperor Wen Di (in power 581–604) of the Sui dynasty made it illegal for widows to remarry if they came from upper-class families. One of the best qualities a widow could possess in the Song dynasty (960–1127) was nonremarriage. By the time of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), the government even recognized widows with memorial arches. As a result of these practices, there was tremendous pressure for women to stay “faithful,” even if their young fiancés passed away suddenly. The happiness of women seems historically irrelevant based on Chinese laws.

This “one-sided chastity” is all about public face, which only possibly hurts women. Margery Wolf, however, reports chaste widowhood is not an expectation that women outside of upper-class families can meet. She explains in the Taiwanese village in which she conducted field work, a respected widow was one who stayed with her deceased husband’s family, but the desire for male descendants allowed the family to

ignore the ideal of sexual chastity if their daughter-in-law became pregnant. As Wolf puts it: “Virtuous widows among poor farm families were filial widows who stayed with their parents-in-law. Their sex life was not relevant.”³⁷

Zheng Yi (1033–1107), a Song Neo-Confucian philosopher, stated, “But to starve to death is a very small matter. To lose one’s integrity, however, is a very serious matter.”³⁸ His statement clearly implies he believes women are better off dead than remarrying. On the other hand, it is appropriate for men to immediately remarry. Even worse, during the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) society expected young girls to commit suicide; this act was praised and glorified, signifying women are worthless without their husband.

If chastity is a moral value that is to be upheld, then it needs to equally apply to men and women. In the short story “Chaste Widow Memorial Arch,” the concern is chastity for the modern woman. The main character is Lan Yujing, a young girl forced to work as a dance girl in Taipei, the capital of Taiwan, because her family faces financial despair. She is motivated to uphold her chastity for her own self-respect. Yan remembers meaningful words from a lecturer that continues to influence her:

Chastity isn’t a kind of psychological manifestation, but rather a psychological loyalty. . . . At the end the woman writer summed up by saying that chastity should rise up from the shackles of the Confucian teaching of propriety to become character training, should change from being a forced restraint to become self-motivated behavior, and moreover should expand from a one-sided female morality into a complete moral principle for both sexes.³⁹

In summary, “new feminism” in Taiwan advocates the following practices in order to end the Chinese patriarchal family structure that upholds ancestor worship, filial piety, preference for sons, forcing women into “inside” spaces, and denying educational opportunities for daughters:

1. Women should not take on their husband's last name.
2. Women should not place their worth on their dowry and bride price and instead replace it with their earning power by focusing on their career.
3. Reject spatial segregation and job discrimination.

Lu asserts, "Feminist power is needed to eliminate the prejudices of patriarchal Chinese tradition and to build a new society based on rationality" in order to achieve gender equality. To her, the Taiwanese government's support of Confucian ideals is the main obstacle preventing true societal equality. Confucianism continues to be promoted in schools, and Taiwan even celebrates Confucius's birthday.

Similarly, Lin Meirong, an anthropologist, argues that conservative men refute women's proposal to dispose of traditional values by asserting women are trying to abolish Taiwan's identity as a whole. Lin Meirong argues that this statement is invalid because Confucian values "represent a double superimposition—that of the elite on the masses and that of the dead Confucian values of mainland China before the revolution on the living, pluralistic values of a Taiwan that has developed its own distinct culture."⁴⁰

Lu paved the way for future female scholars such as Lin's attacks on Confucian tradition, which came over a decade after Lu's works. Lin's perspectives are viewed as less outrageous in her time because of women who spoke out before her. She is sharply critical of the idea of the possible unity of Taiwan and mainland China and believes political parties that favor this agenda propagate a "false Chinese culture." She argues this false Chinese culture upholds the dominant Confucian tradition and forgets "Taiwanese culture" is unique in that it is pluralistic and an amalgamation of elements from aboriginal Taiwanese, immigrants, and recent immigrants from mainland China.⁴¹

Lin calls those who advocate the false Chinese culture “Greater China chauvinists” who want to instill the belief that Chinese culture (Confucian ideals) is superior to Taiwanese culture (a mix of different elements).⁴²

She argues “Taiwan culture is a living tradition, which cannot be separated from the past, present, and future of the island of Taiwan. But the false Chinese culture on Taiwan has no land; it has only a past without a present or a future.”⁴³ She embraces Taiwan’s intricate history of different influences and is heartbroken when she sees one dominating culture trying to force others out. In “Taiwan, My Mother” she personifies Taiwan and laments over the slowly disappearing Taiwanese dialect and culture because of the Confucian ideals forced by the government, but ends her poem with hope that her “mother” will survive.⁴⁴

Lin particularly emphasizes the discrimination towards women Confucian ideals support. She is especially against the double standards that are required of female chastity and the perspective that women are worthless or useless if they do not enter into marriage and motherhood.⁴⁵ She does not hold back from poignantly attacking specific leaders, such as Chairman Lin Yangkang, who propagated chastity and even made it illegal for widows to remarry within six months after their husband’s death.⁴⁶ Women like Lin, whether we agree with their perspectives or not, are courageous to speak out against the injustices they feel women face and have made it easier for women to speak out publicly in mainstream society in Taiwan. Mainland China is experiencing new changes of its own, and one could argue mainland China is experiencing a “new feminism” too. Based on this argument, unification could produce a collective voice for women’s equality and rights.

Universalism and Personalization

As mentioned in prior sections, most Buddhist practitioners in Taiwan truly practice a mixture of Buddhism, Daoism, Confucianism, and folk religion, which is termed Chinese popular religion.⁴⁷ Taiwan's appreciation for personalization allows women to shape Buddhism for their own benefit. Women in Taiwan are strongly involved in religious practices and are popular religion enthusiasts. Sociologist Zhu Haiyuan argues there is a pattern towards universalism and individualism in religious practices among women in Taiwan.⁴⁸ He asserts the universalism is evident in the increased popularity of pan-Chinese deities like the faithful military hero Guan Gong, Shakyamuni Buddha, and Guan Yin Bodhisattva, and pan-Taiwanese deities such as the immensely popular Ma Zu, a maternal goddess whose protection was sought by the Chinese immigrants who sailed from mainland China to the island of Taiwan.⁴⁹ In addition to the universalistic approach, there is also a focus on the self in each individual's religious practices.

For example, the activities at the Xing Tian Temple reflect this individualistic style of worship.⁵⁰ The Xing Tian Temple is conveniently situated in the middle of busy Taipei and has branch temples in Bei Tou and San Sia. The military god Guan Gong (third century CE), who serves as the healer and protector for the people of Taiwan, dwells in this temple.

Temples' membership, such as Xing Tian Temple, is overwhelmingly female. Women are active agents in religious communities, which are noted by the frequency of their visits and the services they use, particularly those related to divination. One reason women visit temples often in Taiwan is because they function as a resource center for

them when they encounter problems in their personal lives. Since many fortune-tellers and spirit mediums are female, women feel comfortable addressing their issues with them.⁵¹ Also, Confucian ideals are still ingrained in the female psyche and they do not want to lose face by visiting a psychologist or a women's help center. The diviners, therefore, often act in place of a psychologist or medical professional. Further, women play the role of the protector or healer in their own families so they seek help from the gods, goddesses, and diviners for the health, safety, and happiness of the family members.

A number of rituals are practiced across most temples in Taiwan. Most of these rituals are divination practices. One reason why divination is so popular in mainstream culture in Taiwan is partly due to the unstable history of Taiwan and the constant foreign influences and changing leadership of the island. Divination allows individuals to find answers and provides stability or peace of mind. *Shou jing* is a common ritual performed to restore health, both mentally and physically. Generally a woman is the healer and performs this rite with three sticks of incense. She waves the sticks in front of the person who needs healing three times, then around her head, and behind her back seven times. She completes this entire process twice. Following this course of action, the diviner throws the crescent-shaped divining blocks to confirm whether the *shou jing* was successful.

The divining blocks also are used to provide guidance for personal or business questions. The worshiper whispers her name, address, age, and problem, and then throws the blocks. If one block rests in a convex position and the other in a concave position, this result signifies an affirmative answer from the god. When she achieves that position,

the worshiper selects a bamboo stick, which is numbered and contains a written forecast for her issue. Psychologist Yu Tehui explains: “. . . if the divine response in fact comes true, then the devout believer has greater confidence in the efficacy of the god and an increased sense of divine protection. On the other hand, if the divine response is contradicted, then the believer sees herself as the reason: she was not sincere enough and thus decides to visit the temple even more often.”⁵² We often see this self-blame across different cultures. Many religiously devout individuals blame themselves for everything that goes wrong (and rarely the god or goddess), but when the outcome is positive, they usually credit the divine force. This lack of self-credit indicates a high level of insecurity.

Women enjoy this personalized worship because it provides them with some security and confidence, albeit at many times just temporary, and the rituals act as conduits between the earthly and the divine existences. For example, a young educated woman shares her experience:

I was born and raised in a household that placed importance on worship. My eyes and ears were filled with respect for the deities since I was young, but I didn't pay too much attention to these things because I really didn't think that they existed. What is strange is that I imperceptibly received an omen that I must enter their midst. When I was studying at university, my family was down on its luck because our business failed. My mother went to Hsing-t'ien Temple every month to pray, hoping and trusting that we could overcome this difficulty. Perhaps with my mother's devoutness we finally got through that period of inhuman days; moreover, our family situation finally began to gradually improve. Therefore, for over half a year I accompanied my mother to Hsing-t'ien Temple on the first and fifteenth day of every month. One day while I was placing incense sticks, suddenly there was a heavy power urging me forward to pay attention. I can't express that mysterious feeling. It was as if my whole body was full. No longer was I a solitary body—it was as if I discovered a source, telling me that this was only a beginning. That feeling continued for several days; sometimes I even felt like my mind was shining bright.

Having gone through several months of feeling my way through the darkness, I hoped to try again, hoping and trusting to again have that peaceful, moving feeling.

Perhaps it was only an awakening which allowed me to discover that there are too many unfathomable mysteries that need to be pondered. Actually, now my footsteps tarry not only at Hsing-t'ien temple; I have been to many major temples all over the province. I am not intent on getting people's attention; I only hope that in the coming months I will again have an even deeper understanding.⁵³

This young woman's testimony reveals her desire to gain a spiritual insight into why certain events occur. Her quest for this understanding is very personal because she is searching for her own spiritual awakening.

Older women also use the resources at temples, but usually for the protection of their loved ones. Yu describes her encounter with an old woman who prays to Guan Gong to heal her ailing daughter: "Lord Benefactor! Please protect the Juan family's daughter. Since she was born her stomach and intestines have not been well, and the doctor has not been effective either. Today I have come to get a charm of incense ashes with the hope that your lordship will protect her, protect her well."⁵⁴

Most temple volunteers are over the age of forty and their temple activities are the focus of their lives. In Taiwan there are approximately four to five hundred temple ritual specialists and the turnover is very low.⁵⁵ These diviners generally have many years of experience performing popular rites, and the interpretation of written omens requires training. Most of the diviners are women with older children. They enjoy servicing powers, feeling a sense of purpose, and being a part of a sacred community. The rituals can be physically demanding, and many of the old women stand for hours performing the rituals. The women feel accomplished and fulfilled when they see worshipers return for their services.

Along the same lines as Chinese popular religion, religious sects also offer women special roles in their communities and allow them to seek spiritual awakening. Female members in contemporary religious sects hold a special status and a unique group identity. David Jordan and Daniel Overmyer bring to light the experiences of specific female members of contemporary religious sects in Taiwan. They report approximately half of the leadership positions in the Compassion Society are held by women.⁵⁶ They do point out, however, that the chair, the position that holds the greatest authority, is held by a man, but it is still unique that so many women achieve powerful positions.⁵⁷

Jordan and Overmyer share their encounter with an interesting female leader with the religious name “Phoenix Pencil.” Phoenix Pencil serves as a channel between spirits and humans. She is a qi wielder, which means she has the inner power to channel spirits or transcend the mortal world, and through her the spirits are able to communicate with earthly beings through spirit-writing. Spirit-writing involves specialized vocabulary and participants. One person is possessed by the spirit and the assistant translates the characters written and records them. The qi wielder position is significant because “since the activity of the hall is formally directed by divine command, manifested through the qi, the qi wielder must formulate and represent an image of divine will and divine action that is in accord with the member’s expectations, tolerance, hopes, and interest.”⁵⁸

Phoenix Pencil did not have the opportunity to pursue an education, as was common for many women born at the end of World War II. She describes the discrimination she faced because she is a woman: “Everybody valued boys and not girls. That was the old rural society. I went to school on my own. My father said that if I went he would cut off my legs. I went myself. I walked every day.” She started her college

coursework but her father forced her to quit and get married. She feels her position as a qi wielder and divine reader brings her a similar fulfillment as her curtailed education experience.⁵⁹

Why do these women participate in religious sectarian activities rather than community-based temples? The problem with the community-based temples is they still hold a strong patriarchal structure, which is reflected in many of the festivals that uphold the male hierarchy and Confucian ideals. In community-based temple activities, we still see a spatial separation of men and women into outside versus inside roles. Women play the role of performing domestic rituals and ensuring the well-being of the family. Men are privileged with public leadership roles because they are responsible for community rituals and community health and safety. Daoist priests are all necessarily male at temple festivals. The *lu zhu*, the person heading the temple festival, is a highly respected position and also necessarily male, as dictated by tradition.⁶⁰ In community-based temple festivals, women are merely laborers who assist men. As a result, the option of assuming public leadership roles with more emphasis on personalized worship in Xing Tian Temple and contemporary sectarian societies are much more attractive for women.

The new opportunities in sectarian societies fulfill a void for many women, such as in the case of Phoenix Pencil, whether it is intellectual aspirations or to feel a sense of community. Phoenix Pencil, however, may have a more privileged position than usual because she is the daughter-in-law of the temple owner.⁶¹

Other women involved in the Compassion Society have shared how their participation has allowed them to personalize religious traditions for their own personal fulfillment.⁶² Exquisite Fragrance is uneducated but holds a special status in the

Compassion Society because of her prophecies through her dreams and visions. She is believed to possess great goodness and be placed in the safety of the Golden Mother. The Golden Mother, a female goddess, is the main divinity of the Compassion Society. Exquisite Fragrance claims the Golden Mother has confirmed her prophecies through spirit-writing activities that took place in the society. She shares the Golden Mother's message:

You are like a piece of bamboo, for your heart is firm and merciful, and although people may harm you and cut you down, you do not fall because you have been practicing the Way. Until now you have been like this staff of bamboo. You have already grown to putting forth green buds and a bamboo head and the staff is long. If anyone should want to hurt you, he would have great difficulty in getting to you.”⁶³

Exquisite Fragrance credits the Golden Mother for her visions and producing miracles in her personal life. She observes the Golden Mother's work all around her.⁶⁴ Exquisite Fragrance and two other women have, in fact, formed their own small cult within the Compassion Society.⁶⁵

One of these two women is Exquisite Compassion. She has also had revelations, one “congratulating her on her sacrifices for her children and on remaining unmarried after the death of her husband, despite her economic difficulties and the economic motivation to seek a new husband.”⁶⁶ Here we see visions by a sect member rewarding her for her adherence to the traditional Confucian ideal of chastity and for her sacrifices to fulfill the goal of continuing the male family line. In addition to participating in Compassion Society activities, she set up an altar to the Golden Mother in her own home and has a daughter who serves as a spirit medium there.⁶⁷ The Golden Mother is the center of her life and has compensated her for the difficulties caused by traditional Chinese ideals of filiality and women's morality.⁶⁸

Another sect member, Zhen Xiuhua, believes in the Buddhist concept of karma and deems her present status as being based on her past actions. She claims to have experienced visions of her previous lives and the consequences of her actions in those lives. According to a revelation through spirit-writing, after a life as an extremely filial daughter, she was reborn as a son in a rich family. In this life he/she was an immoral philanderer, and after dying at age thirty-two, his/her spirit appeared before the king of hell. The king of hell angrily said:

In your last life you did very well. This time I gave you an incarnation in a rich family, and you didn't contribute to the poor or relieve suffering; you spent your money on women and covered your body with gold. This is unsatisfactory. This time I shall give you an incarnation as a woman, as the daughter of the Ch'en family in Tainan, in Taiwan province. . . . You'll wed into a rich family, but you'll not enjoy what they have. That will be your fate. But although this is your current situation, do not despair. If you study the Way, then in the future you will be able to overcome the "sea of troubles" and be reincarnated no more.⁶⁹

This vision supports Chinese society's preference for sons and the many obstacles women face because of this preference. Exquisite Compassion believes her present status as a woman is due to her lack of good actions in her previous life as a man. This belief is most likely based on her knowledge and the impact of Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and ancestral worship.

Chinese sectarian societies clearly fulfill some women's desires for educational opportunities, particularly those who were denied a traditional education. Zhen Xiuhua, for example, had six years of formal schooling but could not continue. Her desire for an education has been fulfilled by her role as a copyist in the Compassion Society. She records spirit-writing in her sect and was self-taught. When she was asked to become a copyist, she "burned incense to the immortals and buddhas and prayed that if they wanted

to use me as a copyist they might send me inspiration” and afterwards she received a message in her dream telling her to accept the position as a copyist.⁷⁰

This environment supporting women has fostered a number of documented women who were considered remarkable religious teachers. Venerable Bhiksuni Hiu Wan, for example, is a scholar, artist, and Chan (Zen) master in Taiwan. As a result of the many sacrifices made on behalf of women in Taiwan, the order of the nuns in Taiwan has flourished since the fifth century, unlike in other parts of Asia.

Women are attracted to Taiwan because of the public and empowering roles offered to women in the religious sphere. In Taiwan, whether they are interested in Buddhism, Daoism, or Chinese popular religion, women have access to leadership roles through divination, healing, and oracles. The status of women, however, is dependent on the government’s decision to either uphold Confucian ideals or acknowledge the new pluralism of Taiwan.

Although great progress has been made for women in Taiwanese society, the patriarchal traditions still pervade the mainstream psyche. Women continue to encounter discrimination based on their gender and to be given roles they do not want to perform. Confucianism is deeply ingrained in the government and educational systems in Taiwan, and it will take time to change; extreme measures may be needed for transformation. These ideals trickle down from the government system to the family system, where each family member has his or her own specific responsibilities. Although women in Taiwan have religious freedom of expression, it is still difficult for them to reject the influence of Confucian principles.

The majority of women in Taiwan do not completely reject their domestic duties, but at the same time they do not want to fully submit to their fathers, husbands, and sons. Because of the amalgamation of the religious cultures in Taiwan and the diverse foreign influences in Taiwan's history, it is much easier for women in Taiwan to mold their own practices by selecting their preferred elements from different systems. By picking and choosing their preferences, women are able to serve their own personal interests. Margery Wolf, for example, discovered that women in rural areas in Taiwan uphold the importance of the family but disregard the emphasis of male lineage. She found that women used bonds of affection and loyalty to bind their children to them in their own "uterine families," which excluded the husband and his family.⁷¹ Women created this uterine family for their own emotional and material support, because they recognized that their own interests were often in conflict with those of their husband's family. Whereas the Confucian teachings of filial piety, female submission, and chastity served the interests of the male lineage, women used more personal and affective means to serve their own interests.⁷²

We can note this bond to the mother in today's women in Taiwan, particularly working urban women. Although filial piety and ancestor worship are two traditions that most people in Taiwan want to uphold, their views concerning filial piety differ. A new study shows that women still feel a part of their own biological family, although Confucian ideals "require" women to be a part of their husband's family. It is common for urban working women to financially support their own parents as a modern day expression of filial piety. However, some of these women offer this financial support in secret because they do not want to offend others.⁷³ Many women in Taiwan are focused

on their careers and either do not have many children or have no children at all. They are in a position to support their own parents, especially if they are an only child.

Consequently, in many cases women uphold traditions but add their own twist or a contemporary stance to cater to their own interests. With the increase in women who have financial independence and hold public leadership positions, such as Taiwan's former vice president, many no longer need men and have the power to transform certain traditions they feel no longer apply to the modern woman.

This increase in economic and religious freedom is the result of the efforts of the educated women in Taiwan who have stressed the importance of gender equality. The mix of different elements of Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist thoughts allows women to personalize their religious experience and alleviate the suffering caused by the patriarchal system. Religion in Taiwan also adapts to social progress and provides a great opportunity for educated women in Taiwan to make an impact on the religious and social conditions for women not only in Taiwan but, as we will see, also for women around the world.

Women in Chinese Buddhist Schools

Taiwan's Buddhism is strongly influenced by Buddhism from mainland China and Japan due to their complex relationships that continue today. To fully understand Buddhism in Taiwan, we must also be aware of the history of religion in China and Japan. For this reason, the history of religion in mainland China and Japan will also be further discussed in detail. At the beginning of the Common Era, Mahayana emerged in India and considered themselves "the Greater Vehicle." Mahayana argued they were more

inclusive; subsequently, the older vehicles were derogatorily named Hinayana, or Lower Vehicles. Mahayana argued their distinct teachings include:

1. The spiritual goal was redefined from arhantship to buddhahood. While the pre-Mahayana traditions emphasized that enlightenment consisted of the elimination of desire, aversion, and ignorance, the Mahayana claimed that enlightenment means buddhahood, that is omniscience and limitless compassion in addition to the elimination of desire, aversion, and ignorance.
2. The path toward enlightenment was not so much anymore the eight-fold noble path, but ten stages that a Buddha-to-be, or bodhisattva, had to master in the course of numerous lifetimes. The key elements were to develop consummate wisdom, which entailed a pledge not to realize nirvana until all sentient beings of the entire universe would also be able to do so, and to cultivate an empathy that would embrace every living creature in love and respect 'like one's own mother'.
3. The ideal of the solitary monk entranced in meditation while sitting under a tree was often mocked in favour of the ideal of the Bodhisattva who lived in the world and activated his or her compassion and love within it. The Bodhisattva was in most cases a layperson, and in a few cases female.⁷⁴

A number of Mahayana texts describe the feminine and the Buddhist woman. These texts do not advocate solely for gender equality. For example, Diana Paul highlights descriptions of the feminine:

The first is the notion that the feminine is mysterious, sensual, destructive, elusive, and closer to nature. Association with this nether world may be polluting and deadly for the male and therefore must be suppressed, controlled, and conquered by the male in the name of culture, society and religion. Female sexuality as a threat to culture and society provides religion with a rationale for relegating women to a marginal existence.⁷⁵

This attitude is similarly reflected in Buddhist texts concerning the origin myths of Tibetans:

A female Rock Demon was infatuated with a male monkey, who in reality was a bodhisattva. When she tried to seduce him, the monkey referred to his religious vows of chastity and declined her invitations. In response the Rock Demon indicated that she was consumed by passion and lust and that if he was not willing to comply, a male Rock Demon would certainly do so; and this would result in populating the world with many little demons and create havoc. In the end, the male bodhisattva monkey gives in "for the benefit of all sentient beings."⁷⁶

This story paints a picture of the female as a seductress and dangerous, a carrier of demons. The female is even blamed for the male's weaknesses and wrongdoings. The text does not blame the male for any wrongdoings, and even applauds him for doing the world a favor by caving in to the female. Paul describes the second ideal of the feminine: "The second theme is the notion that the feminine is wise, maternal, creative, gentle, and compassionate. Association with this affective, emotional, transcendent realm is necessary for the male's fulfillment of his religious goals and for his release from suffering. Sexuality may be either controlled or denied in the feminine as sacred."⁷⁷ This second ideal of the woman as the symbol of wisdom, compassion, and sacredness empowers women and is reflected in the Perfection of Wisdom, considered "the mother of all Buddhas." This ideal was upheld in China among Buddhist communities but it is uncertain if it influenced the positions of women in real living societies. Ursula King reports the "symbolic ascendancy of the feminine often goes with a social denigration and low status of women in everyday life," and we must note the difference "between the place given to women in the world of religious imagination and that accorded to them in the actual world of religious life."⁷⁸ King presents to us examples of empowered women in religious imaginations, such as the cults of the Queen of Heaven in Confucian China and the Mother of Jesus Mary in the West. Men fear and discriminate against women in everyday life and, as a result of their guilt; they empower them in the heavenly sphere as a symbol of the sacred, thereby neutralizing the prejudice and sanctity. Neumaier elaborates that prodigiously worshipping the feminine as sacred (as defined by males) permits control and subjugation of women as social beings. This flip-over mechanism is a way in which cultures deal with individuals or institutions that are experienced as

threatening. Therefore, it is a gross mistake to assume that women enjoyed status and prestige similar to men whenever the feminine was extolled as a supreme symbol of sanctity.⁷⁹

Although a number of female goddesses or bodhisattvas are exalted in China, perhaps more so than in most other areas that practice Buddhism, this worshipping of the female in the “world of religious imagination” is not the main reason women in real living societies in Taiwan are empowered. The women hold a less inferior position to men compared to other Asian Buddhist countries because they are financially independent, support other women, and have shrewdly strategized to increase the nuns’ population to dominate the monastic community.

The nuns’ communities in Taiwan are active today and live under the same rules that applied to the very first fully ordained nuns in India. The legal codes and the system of the entire Sangha were transported to China and have survived intact. Why do women in Taiwan want to become Buddhist nuns, and how did women achieve such great influence in Taiwan through Buddhism? In Taiwan, women are attracted to the option to live a life that is not fully bound to the traditional Confucian ideals for women. As a Buddhist nun, they are allowed to escape the traditional family structure.⁸⁰ Bao Zhang, a scholar monk, wrote biographies on sixty-five nuns he viewed as highly accomplished Buddhist figures around 516 CE in *Lives of the Nuns*.⁸¹ This text records the lives and experiences of real nuns who were believed to be great role models. Their achievements are highlighted and they do not refer to their fathers, husbands, or sons. These women’s lives serve as inspiration for women to be responsible and achieve independence.

Although many women did not have the opportunity to have a formalized education in China, scholarship and art are highly valued in Chinese society. Many women do not have formal training but are self-taught or learned through their religious opportunities. Most of the nuns featured in *Lives of the Nuns* are admired for their intellectual and literary skills.⁸² The nuns educated themselves through Buddhist scriptures and eventually became masters of Buddhist literature since the majority of them most likely were not educated on secular subjects. Bao Zhang applauds the nuns for their mastery of sutras, treatises, and disciplinary books, some of which are extremely lengthy. The most popular sutras studied by the nuns were the *Lotus*, *Prajnaparamita*, *Vimalakirtinirdesa*, *Srimaladevi*, and *Mahaparinirvana*.⁸³ These sutras expounded the potential enlightenment of all beings and advocated that women could attain buddhahood. Kathryn Ann Tsai recently translated *Lives of the Nuns* into English and highlights that the nuns' order was controlled by the monks' order, the state, the emperor, and the aristocracy. The nuns' order was highly restricted and was not given the freedom to flourish like the monks' order. For example, the monks' Sangha had the privilege of establishing convents almost anywhere they would like without interference. Whereas the *Lives of the Nuns* records the lives of 65 eminent nuns from the fourth to the sixth centuries CE, *Lives of Eminent Monks* (*Gao seng zhuan*) preserves biographies on 257 monks in addition to many sub-biographies.⁸⁴ The fact that there are over four times more monks' biographies recorded than nuns' reflects the greater influence monks held and the more opportunities men had to become literate. However, it is promising to note that some women did achieve enough influence and esteem to have their experiences preserved.

Many Chinese nuns were highly respected as teachers and taught other nuns and laypeople. As a result, their influence grew and they maintained public roles. They frequently also served as advisors to the court and spiritual advisors to royalty.⁸⁵ Even more outstanding is the nuns often debated with monks and beat them. Nonetheless, the patriarchal structure in China did not allow women to hold high positions, such as abbesses at convents or directors within the nuns' order, or to strongly influence the formation of the Chinese Buddhist schools, which were established in the sixth century CE.

Most of the records written by women have been "lost," but we do hold evidence of some of their commentaries and treatises on doctrine.⁸⁶ Because there is no clear evidence of women's works, it is difficult to examine how women felt about living in their society. However, this absence of women's Buddhist literature reveals that either women were too uneducated to write and were not afforded the opportunity to become literate, men wanted power and disposed of women's works, or both.

By the second century BCE, when Buddhism reached China, the Buddhists began translating the sutras into the Chinese language. Buddhist teachings spread throughout China, but it was not until the sixth century when Chinese Buddhist schools emerged. Buddhism was not immune to the social influences of China at that time, and as a result the religion adapted to its new land and was reshaped by its people. One of the schools was the Pure Land (Tiantai) School, established by the monk Zhi Yi. The basic text of his school was the *Lotus Sutra*, which laid the foundation for their beliefs. The Pure Land monks also studied sutras such as *Prajnaparamita* and *Mahaparinirvana*. The Pure Land School underscored the idea that all beings can attain buddhahood in this life,

regardless of gender.⁸⁷ The Pure Land monks' commentaries reflect a special emphasis that women can achieve enlightenment without transforming into a man.⁸⁸

Another school that surfaced in China during the sixth century was Chan. This school reached its peak during the Tang and Song dynasties (in the seventh to thirteenth centuries). This Buddhist school spread from China to Korea, Japan, Vietnam, and eventually to the West. Chan is currently one of the most practiced forms of Buddhism in East Asia. The teacher holds a special role in Chan and guides his apprentices through meditative training. It is through meditation, Chan believes, that a being will be awakened. Chan does not focus as much on Buddhist scripture as other Chinese Buddhist schools, but its main text is *Prajnaparamita*. Like the Pure Land School, Chan also believes all beings can attain buddhahood and there is no such thing as maleness or femaleness.⁸⁹ They often use the case of the Dragon Princess's ability to attain enlightenment to argue gender is irrelevant and we should not be deluded.⁹⁰ Both Chan and Japanese Zen clearly point out women can attain buddhahood.

In Chan literature, which preserves records of transmission of the Buddhist teachings, called *Rong de zhuan deng lu*, women are rarely recorded in their master-disciple lineages. However, there is one woman, the Abbess Moshan Liaoran, who holds her own record; she is a notable case in which her disciple, monk Zhixian, fully recognizes her as his teacher. Disregarding the rules of the *Vinaya*, he bowed down to the abbess and claimed he reached enlightenment under her guidance.⁹¹ Her record shares an account of when they first met. Zhixian was hesitant because he felt her female gender and enlightened state were incongruous, but after she taught him the doctrines of

emptiness he was awakened and no longer discriminated. Her ability to help him use his logic actually convinced him she was truly enlightened.

Further, Taiwan in particular experienced tremendous social changes in the wake of colonialism. Buddhist traditions and institutions were shaped by the colorful economic and political history in Taiwan. The Buddhist laity in Taiwan has tremendous influence on the success and wealth of their Buddhist monastic communities. The monks' and nuns' orders live in great comfort due to the generous donations of the laypeople, who give them money for food, medicine, robes, beautiful buildings, and so forth. They even give them large donations of land and the ability to give salaries to workers to maintain the properties the monastic communities own. Generally the monarchy and Buddhist institutions interlocked because the monarchies wanted to have the upper hand and even absorb some of the money earned by the Buddhist institutions for their own gain, such as in the case of the Chinese Imperial Court. However, in the wake of European colonialism, this interlocking diminished. In many areas in Asia, Buddhism's influence diminished as the local monarchs were overthrown, meaning they lost their largest sources of donations. With the establishment of missionary schools, western and Christian ideas spread across Asia, in many cases forcing Asians to see the West as superior. However, the positive outcome is the missionary schools improved education, which led to the literacy of many Buddhist nuns, giving them the tools to increase their social status among Buddhist institutions and in the public sphere. Women across Asia focused on providing social services for the disadvantaged while meditating and studying, and planning to reinstate the order of the nuns and increase the nuns' population. Because of the influence of the West, many traditionalists blame the goal of

reclaiming the full ordination of nuns on the western feminists. For example, at the 1993 conference of Sakyadhita, the international organization of Buddhist nuns in Sri Lanka, the Ministry of Buddhist Affairs offered its support to the conference on the condition that the reintroduction of full ordination for nuns would not be discussed.

Recent research by Wijayasundara and Malalasekara on the various lineages of the Buddhist *Vinaya* and the transmission of ordination resulted in their agreement that according to the authoritative texts, a reinstatement of the full ordination for women is possible and legitimate.⁹² Proponents of reinstating the full ordination point also to the *Mahaparinibbana*, where the Buddha authorized the ordination of nuns through monks and, further, point to the fact that minor rules can be and often are suspended, and that this could be applied to this issue.⁹³

The Buddhist monastic and lay communities in Taiwan certainly support this idea that “minor rules can be and often are suspended” because they have been ordaining women who want to become fully ordained Buddhist nuns from around the world for the past few decades. Taiwan, influenced strongly by the West, is an example of how American Feminism has instilled a challenge within the Taiwanese female psyche to expel the gender bias ingrained in traditional Confucian ideals that have shaped their Buddhist traditions. We have definitely seen women’s progress and their coming together for a common goal. For example, at Bodhgaya, India, in 1987, nuns formed the International Association of the Sakyadhita, which organizes annual meetings to discuss the situation of Buddhist nuns around the world. The organization has as its objective to improve the education and the status of nuns, and foremost to bring back full ordination.⁹⁴ Although the West perceived Asian cultures as exotic and may have wanted

to impose their “superior” ideas onto Asian lands, and in many cases they succeeded, they also strengthened certain Asian religions by giving the underprivileged an opportunity for an education. As International Association of the Sakyadhita realizes, education is a necessary step for nuns to increase their status around the world.

Early western missionaries viewed Chinese women as oppressed and demoralized due to Confucian ideals that shaped Buddhist institutions. Similarly, the twentieth-century reformers shared this view and argued that women devoted to traditional Confucianism were subjugated. These outside influences and reformers forged the path to reshaping women’s roles and increasing the social status of women in Taiwan, which has led to reformations based on its multicolored history.

In ancient times women in China played powerful roles in both the heavenly and earthly realms. There were numerous goddesses: Mother Goddess; Nu Hua, who created humankind; Xi Wang Mu, the Queen Mother of the West who held the power of immortality; and Tou Mou, who controlled life and death, to name a few. These female gods were channeled mostly through women who acted as shamans. A shaman’s role was to fulfill her or his calling by the spirits. By doing so, the shaman could restore harmony by balancing among human beings, spiritual forces, and the environment. Each spiritualist, healer, or exorcist possessed a particular function. Examples of their function include pairing up couples, increasing fertility, dealing with the dead, healing the sick, communicating with gods or goddesses, performing prophecies and exorcisms, and advising important leaders. These shamans worked closely with the ruler and performed public rituals and offered counseling for specific situations.

Perhaps because of their highly regarded roles, men increasingly felt threatened by women and strategized over time to decrease their roles, particularly in the public sphere. We can see this diminishment of importance in the roles of the shamans and female deities by the increase in male shamans and the transformation of the female deities to male ones during certain historical periods. The Millet Queen in the Zhou dynasty (c. 1040–256 BCE), for example, became the Lord of Millet. Women in general were strongly forbidden to enter the court by 693 BCE. In texts dating from 692 to 509 BCE, the literature strongly illustrates women as dangerous and the ones to blame for moral decline (*Guo Yu*, ‘Zhou Yu’; *Zuo Zhuan*, ‘Duke Zhuang 692 BCE’, ‘Duke Zhao, 509 BCE’).⁹⁵

Confucius’s Impact on Buddhism in China

Confucianism is often blamed for the inferior status of women in China, but in reality the status of women was already low before Confucius’ influence. However, Confucian ideals did further prolong and even debilitate women’s potential to achieve equal status. Confucius’s goal was to end the crisis of the incessant civil wars and social mayhem in China from 722–221 BCE. He applied rituals to the moral, social, and religious spheres and argued rituals were a necessity for a harmonious society. He believed the social upheaval China was experiencing was due to the lack of respect of people for each other, the lack of communication and proper relationships between people, and the lack of responsibility held by each individual. He had very specific rituals for everyone, delineated by their gender and status.

Confucius argued morality is the most critical factor for social harmony. According to him, morality consisted of the exercise of a number of virtues: loyalty, sincerity, filial piety, moral courage, honesty, and so on. A person with all these virtues would then have the attitude of *ren* (humanity). Confucius defined humanity as “not doing to others what you would not have done to yourself.”⁹⁶ He encouraged his followers to look first to themselves and then to act, through ritual, so as to treat others as they wished to be treated. Ritual can truly be understood only by moral beings who are trained to examine their own conscience and then to act in society. Confucius called them *junzi* (gentlemen). The foundation of the Confucian gentleman’s morality was filial piety: respect and service to one’s parents. Gentlemen were to be well versed in the ancient classics, to offer moral and political advice to the ruler, and to be an example to the people. Government would be best served by gentlemen who began in filial piety, became educated, and took their rightful places as government ministers. Such a government, with a moral base, would ensure that the people internalized moral behavior and became happy and prosperous. The ruler, himself a Confucian gentleman or at least advised by Confucian gentlemen, would rule properly and morally.⁹⁷

Confucius’s teachings were specifically for elite highly educated “gentlemen.” For the most part, Confucius ignored women as a whole, and women were not a consideration for any important role in a public position. For society to be “happy and prosperous,” these positions were only appropriate for *junzi*, who were necessarily male.

Prior to the emergence of Confucianism, society in China supported matrilineal inheritance and descendant lines, but afterwards these actions were strongly opposed and society became strongly patriarchal and patrilineal. Filial piety meant good actions

towards fathers and grandfathers. Confucius believed women were a main obstacle in the success of his agenda. He was disgusted with the effect women had on men, especially as wives, mistresses, and spiritual guides. The majority of upper-class women in China were opposed to Confucius's teachings, and Confucius proclaimed that any downfall was due to the interference by women.

Mencius (371–289 BCE) came onto the scene about two decades after Confucius. With Mencius we see a movement towards even more detailed rituals, such as the proper way a man should eat. Further, Mencius carried on Confucius's belief that women are the main impediment to social harmony and spatially specifies the appropriate places each gender should reside. He upheld specific regulations that separated men and women's living or sleeping areas, separated their world of activities, and clearly defined the proper interaction between men and women. This separation between men and women argued for by Confucianism is frequently compared to the keeping of the Sabbath in Judaism in the first century.⁹⁸ These Confucian rituals and ideals were not just upheld within royalty but entered mainstream Chinese culture, decreasing the influence of women and stagnating their potential to assume active roles. Women in Taiwan continue to face challenges due to the fervent ideals of Confucianism that mainstream Chinese culture supports.

The Impact of Philosophical Daoism

During the warring states period, the philosophy of Daoism also came onto the scene. Laozi is considered to be the "founder" of Daoism, which is based on the Way or the ultimate changing pattern in nature and the universe. This concept argued that human

beings need to find their appropriate place in order to achieve harmony with the Dao. The primary text of this school is the *Dao De Jing*, which surprisingly uses images of women to describe the Dao. Some scholars have argued that Daoism is the feminine that counterbalances the masculine in Confucianism.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, even though the text incorporates images of women, it was primarily written for men by a supposed man, and the Dao includes all things. Laozi argues that aggressive, “macho” actions run counter to the way the Dao works. Aggressive actions, according to Laozi, will always fail. The Dao, he says, is never aggressive; it performs all its actions without looking for praise or exalting itself. Because of this the Dao is described as passive and weak. And it is because of this correlation that the Dao is described as female. The reason women are like the Dao, Laozi says, is that they are passive, quiet, and meek. The Daoist critique of attributes usually associated with masculinity is in contrast to most of the thinking during the warring states period; Daoists prefer what they see as feminine attributes. But this critique did not lead to a genuine argument for the equality of men and women. Although Daoist texts at least address women, what they say is not necessarily positive.¹⁰⁰

Overall, Daoism does not improve the status of women in Taiwan. Although there are images of women in the text, the feminine/women are viewed in terms of being “passive, quiet, and meek.” In other words, Daoism reaffirms the roles women are forced to assume.

In the next chapter, we will discuss a special ethnic group in Taiwan called the Hakka, with a focus on Gaoxiong’s Meinong Village, where residents are mostly Hakka. The Hakka have their own dialect and way of dressing, and some argue the Hakka

women are among the first feminists in China. In Meinong Village, almost 100 percent of the Buddhist monastic community is Hakka women, and we will explore how their historical background, early roles and actions, and reinvention of identity fit perfectly with their daily Buddhist rituals and activities and overall Buddhist concept of the self.

CHAPTER 5

The Hakka: Why Most Hakka Embrace Buddhism and Syncretism

To understand the psychology of the Hakka, why most embrace the syncretism of Chinese religions, and why most consider themselves Buddhists, we must first study their migratory past. Among all the Chinese people, the Hakka are often considered among the most conservative in keeping the traditions; however, many are willing to take risks and seek new opportunities elsewhere to establish themselves. The migratory tradition resulted in the distribution of Hakka to the most remote parts of the world. The Hakka people, paradoxically conservative and endeavoring, hard-working and enduring, are reflective of the spirit of Taiwan's cultural diversity and compatible with Chinese Buddhism.

Since the Hakka uphold their distinct identity and culture, many times with tremendous pride, they have experienced the disdain of people who identify themselves with other groups. In fact, because of their propensity to be cohesive, they have often been victims of discrimination and even murder. For example, American Consul for Taiwan James Davidson describes how the Hakka were treated in China: "In China they were considered as outcasts . . . and although industrious, they were driven about from place to place, and, like the Jews, possessed no land they could call their own. To other classes of mainland Chinese, . . . the Hakka were but little better than barbarians, and were considered fit subjects for persecution."¹

Along the same lines, C. Fred Blake illustrates the status of the Hakka in *Ethnic Groups and Social Change in a Chinese Market Town*:

Hakka, literally designates "guest people." In general, it is quite a polite reference to immigrants. But in particular historical contexts, the name

“Hakka” expressed contempt for people from northeastern Kwantung. In nineteenth-century feuds with the Cantonese and the Hokkien, the Hakka were stigmatized as “rootless vagabonds” and “rabble-rousing hillbillies.” Specifically, Cantonese and Hokkien referred to Hakka as “guest bandits”, “surly foreigners”, and “wild aborigines”. Well into the Twentieth century groups who were customarily identified as “Hakka” on the basis of their speech renounced the name as degrading to their dignity. In fact modern scholars still find it difficult to understand “why the Hakka should be without a name with which to describe themselves other than the one which means foreigners.”²

Traditionally the Hakka have chosen to identify themselves based primarily on their language, cultural experiences, and ethnic consciousness. Mantaro Hashimoto, a Japanese linguist, explains: “The extraordinary firm ethnic tie and consciousness among the Hakka must have been constantly contributing to the unity among the dialects.”³ Blake similarly describes the Hakka focus on linguistic group identity over a homeland group identity. Their sense of native place is comparatively weak, perhaps because they never had a great agricultural or commercial “homeland as did other speech groups. The Hakka’s uncanny speech group cohesiveness correlates with the unusual homogeneity of their language. . . . Their linguistic homogeneity and ethnic consciousness is due partly to the Hakka experience of discrimination and segregation, the recency of the Hakka diaspora, and the migratory nature of their economic adaptation.”⁴

Lynn Pan also emphasizes the Hakka’s migratory past and lack of a homeland. She presents to us a common comparison between the Hakka and the gypsies: “The Hakka, whose name means ‘guest families,’ have been described as the gypsies of China, people who live side by side with speakers of different dialects in enclaves scattered across six southern provinces, without a homeland of their own.”⁵

American Foreign Service officer Leo Moser, a specialist on Chinese affairs, presents his view of the Hakka in his day:

In China today, the Hakka remain unique. It is unusual for a subgroup of Han Chinese to demonstrate the kind of group identity that the Hakka have—one based not so much on . . . native place, or local customs as on a strong feeling of a separate interest that must be protected. This seems clearly the result of a long history of conflict with surrounding peoples. Throughout all their migrations, Hakka groups were most careful to maintain their distinctive marriage customs, style of dress, folk songs, clan organizations, traditional genealogies, and the link. . . . The sense of group identity of other Sinitic subgroups, however—to the extent that they feel one—is tied to the land, to the native place. . . . The Hakka have been denied these roots in the land.

Sometime in the long-forgotten past they were dispossessed, and they have never quite settled down again. As a consequence, their tie is to the group itself, and this tie goes wherever Hakka go.⁶

However, the most stressed characteristic of the Hakka is the ability for the Hakka to survive in new places and seek new opportunities. Jennifer E. Manning, a Hakka expert, shares her observation regarding the Hakka reputation:

This is not to say, however, that the Hakka identity is doomed to fade into the national and international woodwork. The “Fifth Wave” of migration may not yet be finished. The Hakka reputation for rebelliousness is one that has been built up over thousands of years; it is not soon likely to disappear. . . . It is precisely the people’s willingness to adopt new ideas and take new risks that have in many ways preserved their identity . . . the Hakka, of Kwantung and elsewhere, are dynamic, not static, society, and their identity reflect this.⁷

Similarly, Manabu Nakagawa highlights the Hakka characteristic of rebelling against the authoritative systems: “On the whole, it cannot be a wild speculation to assume that there is a principle of unification in social structure among the Hakka settlements which is quite different from the principle of the ordinary power structure of states, and that the principle exerts its vigorous defiance in case of collision with strong authoritarian figures.”⁸

Some Hakka today are of mixed race due to their ancestors' extensive migratory past and new encounters. Kiang explains why many may be of a mixed race, even if they are not aware of it, but are able to still hold a unique group identity:

We cannot trace with certainty all the streams, but these must have been several of them from native sources in Central Asia and North China, reaching the south in various contingents and at different times. They are a culturally sinicized minority whose ancestry and character can be traced to Tungusic roots, presently living in consciousness of their separate ethnicity in response to the Chinese attitudes toward them. Despite centuries of migration and hardship, ethnic and political conflict, economic and minority disadvantage, Hakka have been able to survive and maintain their identity unique among the peoples of China.⁹

The study of Hakka is a study of the preservation and endurance of an ancient heritage under the constant impact and influence of others, which is in line with what Taiwanese nuns experience. Some refer to the Hakka as Jews of the Chinese. According to Sieleung Lee, author of *The Origin of the Hakka Chinese*, a more appropriate analogy may be that of a dandelion, a minute flower resilient enough to endure the most adverse environments, travel to all parts of the world, plant its roots in the poorest soils, and bloom with yellow flowers. These yellow flowers also have many valuable culinary and medicinal applications, although few people are aware of them. They come in various forms, tall and short, large and small. They become accustomed to their new surroundings, but still maintain their identity as dandelions.

The United Nations estimates that approximately 6,000 languages are under the threat of disappearing due to the pressure of other dominant languages and cultures. The Chinese language is a written language that has survived history. It is one of the few languages in which texts written 2,500 years ago are still readable today. The spoken language, however, perhaps possesses a different fate. If the Hakka language is to endure

in the future, Hakka parents must pass down their Hakka language skills to their children or there must be an interest in learning this spoken language among outsiders.

Migratory Outcasts with a Pioneering Spirit

Who are the Hakka and why are they compared to the Jews and gypsies? What are Hakka religious and cultural rituals? How are they identified by others, and do they identify themselves in the same way? Unfortunately, written records are not very helpful in answering these questions. However, scientific studies have led scientists to believe the Hakka are related to the Mongolian people in the north. They discovered these findings through DNA research of cells and genes, which uncovered a genetic linkage with Mongolian people of the same strain, that now live in North China, Japan, Korea, Mongolia, Siberia, and Taiwan. Moreover, scientists have also investigated the genetic patterns of human characteristics on behavior that connect these two groups. Specialists argue that heredity influences human behavioral characteristics. There are numerous theories regarding the origins of the Hakka, and many scholars have brought their theories to the forefront. One thing that is certain is that the origins of the Hakka are uncertain. Kiang claims most scholars of their history believe that they are of mixed ancestry that includes a strain of natives from northern parts of the Asian mainland and a perhaps less dominant strain from coastal regions of southeast China due to migration and mixed marriage. According to Hakka traditions and family records, the “original home” of the group was North China. This is generally supported by various pieces of historical and linguistic evidence, together with social customs. As early as 300 BCE, near the end of the Zhou period, the Hakka were first located in western Shandong with

some minor populations in the southeastern borders of Shanxi, the northwestern frontiers of Anhui, and the areas on the south side of the Yellow River (Huang He) in Henan during the Han dynasty. The Hakka regions of North China can be traced through inscriptions on tombstones and the family tablets in the ancestral halls. The evidence is also confirmed by popular ballads among the Hakka which allude to homelands in the border regions south and southwest of Shandong.¹⁰

The Hakka folklore also provides support for the theory that the Hakka migration went from the Shandong and Shanxi regions to south China. They migrated in this pattern because the Hakka were farmers and needed fertile land to ensure survival. The Hakka were involved in many wars along the way because people already inhabited these fertile lands and wanted to defend their ownership of them.

Historians hold theories that sometimes are in conflict. Some believe the origin of the Hakka is in the Yellow River region. Other scholars argue the Hakka came from abroad. Historical written evidence does not provide concrete evidence of one Hakka origin, and scientific studies are relatively new. As a result, there is not one theory that is completely accepted as to the origin of the Hakka.

The Mystery of Their Ethnic Evolution

The conundrum of the ethnic evolution of the Hakka has produced not only conflicting theories, but also theories to explain these disparities. Kiang explains that the contemporary Chinese residing in the central plains of the Yellow River region are not quite identical with Hakka in terms of languages, customs, and behavior characteristics. By studying the known range of Hakka genealogical records, we have placed their

original homeland in various places within different provinces. This is a clear indication that the Hakka did not originate from that Yellow River region. It is a common practice for the people in China to identify their ethnic roots with a specific geographic location. Every province or place has myths about the deplorable or temperamental characteristics of the people of other provinces or places. All native Chinese groups traditionally have a strong sense of loyalty and identification with their homeland. They have long had strictures against migration and emigration abroad. Hakka, nevertheless, do not associate their ethnic identity with a specific region of the central plains in north China. Interestingly enough, they do not call themselves the people of Shandong, Shanxi, or Henan. They simply mention the place where they were born without identifying their ethnic background. Shanxi is known as the cradle of Chinese civilization and the base of the ancient traditions of the Han Chinese, but Hakka settlements by the second and third centuries BCE had already spread beyond the province of Shanxi.

Certainly we can suggest they must have come from an area other than what they presently believe to be their original homeland. Further, their claimed areas of domicile are scattered in different regions or across provinces of the central plains. Their family records have indicated their presence in early days as being broader in scope, both historically and geographically, and more migratory in activity than natives of that region. Moreover, people who have arrived from abroad have a propensity for wandering in search of a better place to live.¹¹

Since the historical documents have not provided sufficient evidence to clue us in to the origins of the Hakka, there has been a shift towards genetic research to trace the

roots of the Hakka genealogy. Medical scientists began to study Chinese blood groups as early as the 1930s:

In the 1930s and the 1940s medical scientists carried out investigations on the ABO blood groups in Chinese, with a resultant evidence of the high frequency of group B as the outstanding feature for this blood group. In 1950 further tests were conducted on the various blood groups of selected Chinese population. The Hakka samples were taken in Malaya and the results of the data revealed the high frequency (48%) of blood group O and 54% of MN types. These blood features occur in nomads in Central Asia. Among the peoples that we are culturally Chinese, “some marked groupings do occur which verge on the racial and seem to provide evidence of imperfect amalgamation. One of the most notable examples is the Hakka.”¹²

The DNA research may reveal the migratory pattern of the Hakka ancestors.

Ethnological studies have rocketed in popularity, especially in Japan, since World War II, which has led to some interesting findings regarding the early Mongolian emigration patterns. To clarify, Mongolians are Hunnish and Tungusic descendants and have mixed with Turkish blood. They are ethnically regarded as Ural-Altaic. This group of Altaic people includes an expansive group that resides from Siberia and Northeast Asia to the Mediterranean and the Balkan peninsula. The Altaic people speak 40 different languages. Two individuals who belong to different sub-families may not even understand each other.

One biomedical physician who has made great advances in the field of genetic research is Dr. Hideo Matsumoto, President of Osaka Medical University. He has been conducting genetic studies since 1966. Matsumoto is a specialist on the identification of genes in gamma globulin. In cooperation with scientists in other countries, he collaborated with Moscow University in gathering various samples of blood for research from different parts of Asia including China, Korea, Russia, Taiwan, and Southeast Asian

countries. His findings reveal that in the Mongolian race there are four major types of GM genes, which are a major component of genes linking all the Mongolian people including Japanese, Koreans, and Hakka (the people from north China). His research proves that Koreans, Japanese, and Hakka have a common ancestor. Linguistic features change according to the cultural environment, but the composition pattern of genes remains the same unless they marry outside the group. The Mongolian pattern of genes among Japanese is almost identical throughout Japan including Ainu and Okinawans. However, there is a slight variation between Koreans and Japanese, though their genes are generally identical. The composition pattern of genes among Japanese is almost identical with Buryat and Yakut inhabitants from the Lake Baikal region in Siberia. Among the Han people in China, there is a genetic division between the north and the south. The majority of the Han people in the north have AxG and ABST genes, but among the Han people of the south, the AFBB element is the dominant strain, making up 85 percent, while some admixture of AG, AxG, and ABST take up only 5 percent each. Specifically, a certain number of people in the south across the Chang Jiang River carry the northern Mongolian type of genetic cells, but this genetic component gets thinner and thinner, subsequently taken over by the AFBB type, which is the unique genes of the Malaysian and Polynesian stock in Southeast Asia. The overlapping of different genes in south Asia indicates migrations of people from the north to the south. Evidence of the northern strain of Mongoloid completely disappears in the areas of Burma, Assam, and the Himalayan countries including Tibet and Nepal, and the Malayo-Polynesian islands.¹³

The results produced by Matsumoto indicate the Lake Baikal region and the areas adjacent to the Altai Mountains in Central Asia are the places of origin of the peoples

with the common Mongolian ancestors. He hypothesizes that they probably migrated from those areas approximately three to twelve thousand years ago, a great span indeed. However, Matsumoto's genetic research and future scientific research can shed light on the unwritten histories of the mysterious past of ethnic groups like the Hakka, and perhaps change the way we perceive certain groups, ultimately changing history.

The Mongoloid's earliest settlements can perhaps be most easily traced by researching the Lake Baikal region. Kiang explains the developments in this region. In 1967, near the city of Irkutsk, Soviet anthropologists discovered two major clusters of Upper Paleolithic settlements that reliable radiocarbon examinations date from between about twenty-five thousand and twelve thousand years ago. They found many broken bones inside these dwellings, and were able to distinguish between men's and women's activities based on artifact distributions. The report by the Russian researchers yielded the clearest evidence to date that there was ancient, significant settlement in Siberia by the Mongoloid.

Today in genetic research, scientists have provided a breakthrough in our knowledge by mapping human genes on the globe. It is an impetus to the exciting scientific exploration of tracking the human gene map for the secrets that make each of us what we are and determine from where we may have come. Scientists have made progress toward gaining a better understanding of the history of human migration from early historic times when written records are unavailable. It is this revelation that has unlocked the secrets of Hakka historical migration.¹⁴

Although the Hakka have suffered persecution and slavery since they were viewed by the inhabitants of the lands they tried to co-occupy as barbarians or less

Chinese, genetic research has proven that the Hakka and the native Chinese inhabitants do not possess clear genetic dissimilarities. The Huns (western Tartars of Mongolia) were the ancestors of the present Mongols, whose ancient settlement was on the upper course of the Amur River. They were nomadic people of Central Asia, usually identified with the Xiongnu of Chinese history. But north China often fell to their invasions. They became persistent and dangerous enemies of early imperial China around 200 BCE under rulers entitled Shan Yu. The various nomadic tribes gradually became assimilated to Chinese ways. They tried to rule in a monarchical fashion by establishing various kingdoms and dynasties in northeast Asia, especially north China. Thus, in the old days before the unification of the seven kingdoms under the Qin dynasty, north China was naturally separated into several ethnic groups, each of which tended to become independent of the central or major power. This easily led to a feudal form of government or clannish and ethnic kingdoms. The nomadic conquerors placed themselves over the Chinese, who often offered servile labor for tribal barbarians.¹⁵

S. M. Shirokogoroff uses his ethnological findings to argue that the Chinese “are a complex of anthropological stereotypes.”¹⁶ He advocates that the origins of the Chinese were in West Central China. The migration eastward produced a mix of the Chinese, Tungus, and Paleoasiatics. Though the Chinese are diverse, there is still a distinct cultural unit.¹⁷

Archeological and ethnographical discoveries show that the areas in northeast Asia that extend from Lake Baikal to the Pacific coast were regions where Tungus, Turko-Mongols, and Paleoasiatics once made their home. They later scattered towards other directions and integrated into Chinese culture and peoples.¹⁸ Specifically, before the

Warring States period of the Chou dynasty in the third century BCE, the Tungusic and Paleoasiatic settlements stretched along the northeastern, lower course of the Yellow River all the way from Shandong, Hebei, and Shanxi to Manchuria, Siberia, and Korea. Therefore, the theory that the ancestors of Hakka came from these ethnic groups is a plausible scenario. In a positive way, this may help explain the birth of Hakka people in north China, although the term *Hakka* was not in use in the north. This theory also helps explain why they are called “foreigners” elsewhere.

In Chinese historical sources, the minority people of ancient China in the north and the east are recorded as Dong Yi, “eastern barbarians” or “eastern bowmen.” Dong Yi or Tong Hu is also an old Chinese name for Korea, and Koreans thus are named the Dong Yi people. But in the western records, they are called Tungus, Turko-Mongols, or Paleoasiatics. They were widely dispersed in Manchuria, the eastern littoral of China, north of the Yangtze River, the Korean peninsula, and the Japanese archipelagos. When the Chinese of the Zhou dynasty clashed with the eastern barbarians on the western coast of the Yellow Sea during the Warring States era, the majority of the eastern barbarians moved towards Manchuria, the Korean peninsula, and the Japanese archipelagos. This migration strongly leads us to believe that the ancient Hakka are direct descendants of the remnants of the eastern barbarians, who were originally from tribes of the Altaic people in Central Asia, all belonging to the Tungusic family and linguistically to the Altaic. The Han character *Yi* alludes to those ancient tribes on the east and north of China. The word *yi* is often used to stand for a foreigner or foreign country. As the descendants of Dong Yi who had once populated the Shandong peninsula and other parts of north China,

Hakka resultantly are called foreigners or barbarians by the Chinese. This explains why the Hakka people often are classified as the non-Chinese tribe.¹⁹

L. H. Dudley Buxton, a British anthropologist, asserts, “It is probable that they should rather be considered as non-Chinese.”²⁰ He argues that their odyssey in the central plains of north China probably took place in the fourth century BCE. There is evidence that they may be a cross between Mongoloid peoples of northern Asia and native people of China proper. As early as the third century BCE, according to their genealogy, they were in north China living side by side with the native majority. They may be descended from the remnants of one of the seven ethnic or clannish kingdoms that were destroyed by the First Emperor of the Chin dynasty in the Warring States period. This probable kingdom is Ji, whose territory was located in the northeast corner of Shantung, and whose minority population presumably comprised sinicized Hunnish people. The Ji Kingdom is the last of the seven kingdoms that the imperial Qin dynasty finally conquered in 221 BCE. The other possibility is the kingdom of Yan that occupied lands adjoining Ji on the southern border of the northeastern sector of the Great Wall. The Yan Kingdom in northern Hebei province was responsible for the early spread of Chinese influence and culture into Korea and southern Manchuria. This may be interpreted as being a result of their assimilation of Chinese culture.

Furthermore, the people of the Tungusic and Paleoasiatic groups are historically recorded as “eastern barbarians” or Dong Yi and the ancestors of the Hakka people are located in the same region. Most importantly, all began their recorded migration during the third century BCE due to conflict with the Chinese. These historical events coincide with the findings of anthropologist Shirokogoroff’s investigation—the Chinese pushed

waves of the eastern barbarians northward into Manchuria from the eastern littoral of China from northeast of the Yellow River to the Korean peninsula.

As the eastern barbarians on the western coast of the Yellow Sea clashed with the Chinese of the Zhou dynasty during the Warring States period, this conflict probably led to the further migration of the Jo Fuku group, other eastern barbarians, toward the Japanese archipelagos. The remainder of the eastern barbarians launched their long trek southward, reaching south China, where they were given a new name—Hakka. Eventually they became more “sinicized” than the descendants of the northern and eastern contingents of the migration. All three barbarian minority groups belong to the Tungusic family and linguistically to the Altaic root; their ethnography in many respects shows traces of Tungusic features and their languages retain several elements characteristic of the common Altaic patterns.

Kiang argues that the Hakka belong to descendants of the Asiatic Huns or Xiongnu, cousins to a Tungusic branch of the Mongoloid race. They are closely related genetically to the major groups of East Asia, including Ainu, Korean, and Japanese. In other words, Hakka, Korean, and majority Japanese all belonged to a single Mongolian race of Asiatic origin. Immediate ancestors of the Hakka originated as barbarians in cold northern regions of central Asia some 2,500 to 3,000 years ago. They inhabited southern Mongolia and Xinjiang in northwest China and then spread over the central Chinese regions in search of a better life.

Asiatic Huns, the steppe dwellers of Central Asia, were first called Xiongnu in Chinese historical records around the fifth century BCE. To search for fertile land, their chieftains led the tribe out of the unproductive steppes. They marched along the easiest

road to cultivated lands from their latest homeland near Lake Baikal via the southeast corridor out of the steppes.

At the end of the third century BCE, Xiongnu formed a great tribal league that was to dominate much of Central Asia for more than five centuries and to become a real threat to China throughout this period. Because of the repeated invasions of the Huns that were a constant threat to China's northern frontier, the kingdoms of north China soon built the Great Wall across the hills to close this pathway for defense. But some Hunnish people continued to come through the northern route and the old Silk Road via Gansu where the Great Wall ended. In fact, the early Chinese emperors failed to use the Great Wall as a barrier to the Hunnish tribes. So, a number of Hunnish or Mongolian tribes were settled in north China in ancient times. In order to substantiate the importance of the Hunnish presence inside the Great Wall, the following events will give an idea of some of their confrontations with the Chinese in the early period of the Han dynasty. About 215 BCE Hun states came into being outside the Wall, and they even employed Chinese clerks and administrators.

Early in the Han dynasty, from 202 BCE to 190 CE, the Hunnish people often overwhelmed the Chinese to become virtual rulers of the Empire. In 201 BCE, Hunnish influential activities intensified and eventually their power penetrated the Great Wall to reach Shanxi province, the region where Hakka traditionally claimed the launching of their first migration to south China and elsewhere.

The following year, 200 BCE, Chinese troops barely declared a victorious war in a battle with the barbarian settlers in north Shanxi. Yet the nomadic horsemen under the leadership of a strong chieftain continued to maraud into north China for decades, and

with some 200,000 expert mounted archers they were capable of posing a formidable threat to China.²¹

In 198 BCE Emperor Gao Zu decided to make peace by agreeing to send the barbarian chieftain foodstuffs, gifts, and brides. This policy of pacifying the barbarians with valuable tributes and Chinese brides was to continue during the Han dynasty at a time when Han's armies were not strong enough to guard the country against barbarian attack.

During the fourth century CE, the Huns of Mongolia conquered north China. Earlier Zhao (or northern Han), one of the southern Xiongnu in Shanxi province, and the kingdom was conquered in 319 by Later Zhao of Xiongnu origin, lasting until 352. Then the Huns turned west and invaded Europe. Their westward expedition contributed to the fall of the Roman Empire.

The Asiatic barbarians had no trouble breaking through the barrier, and their migration and invasion continued in the settlements of China. As invaders, adventurers, and refugees from the steppes, they migrated farther to the cultivated lands of Shanxi, Henan, Anhui, and Shandong where the Chinese predominated. The nomadic people learned to adapt themselves quickly to a new environmental condition. Instead of raiding the Chinese for food, they began settling throughout the wide region extending from Shanxi and Shaanxi in the west to Shandong in the east, and penetrated deeper into the settled areas along the Yellow River, forming an ethnic minority. Hence the fertile region behind the Great Wall became a promised land to the nomads. These barbarians did not number more than a fifth of the inhabitants of the fertile land. They swept across the frontiers of Chinese civilization, but seldom penetrated south of the Yellow River in

the early period. Their strength lay in their fierceness and independence. Generation after generation, they became indomitable settlers of north China, aggressively competing with the natives of the region. The spreading of the Mongolian people over the central plains of north China indeed confirms the scientific findings of Dr. Matsumoto as well as anthropologist Shirikogoroff.

There is a popular folk song that relates the nostalgic story about the separation of the non-Chinese people from their homeland by the Great Wall:

The Great Wall of Ten Thousand Miles
Ten thousand miles long
Beyond the Great Wall is our homeland²²

The First Emperor was an ancient warlord of legendary willpower who completed the unification of China in 221 BCE and cut the Hakka minority off from the world beyond the Great Wall. During the period of separation by the Qin-Han family dynasties, Hakka further created their own brand of sinicized language and ethnic culture. They also refined the group behavior that still distinguished Hakka society from the native majority of China. This is not surprisingly to Hakka, whose families routinely trace their ancestry back for centuries in the Qin-Han era.

The settled Mongols continued seeking fertile lands to meet the needs of growing families because they were agricultural people. Although they were migrant farmers and workers, the Hunnish people never seemed to return to their previous homeland once they settled in a new territory. This propensity to migrate is probably what prevented the Hunnish people from leaving a written history documenting their early beginnings. The other reason is that in 214 BCE, determined to wipe out all opposition, the First Emperor of China committed the act of burning books. It is highly possible that ancient court records and histories pertaining to this period of history were destroyed in the flames.

Eventually their descendants, who were a minority, with the help of the Chinese majority, seized the opportunity to establish the Han dynasty, ruling the great continent of Asia for over four hundred years. Similar to the Mongol and Manchu dynasties of later years, they ruled China using Chinese systems, despite being an alien minority. In the long process of conquest and assimilation, they partially adopted Chinese culture and became a sinicized minority, being regarded as civilized barbarians in the eyes of the dominating Chinese majority. Like sinicized Chinese Muslims from Central Asia, they became a distinct group and separated from their ancient brethren in Central Asia and Mongolia by the selective adoption of aspects of Chinese culture. Distinctive in their speech and customs, they remained separate from the Chinese majority in terms of ethnic characteristics and culture. Throughout history, they were persecuted as strangers and wanderers and molested from time to time. This unique “Hakkaness” began their transformation to a new status as the guest family tribe among the Chinese. Although this explanation about their origin seems to be the most likely scenario, it is not the only one possible.

There are no reliable family records for common people in China. Both Chinese and Japanese sources have indicated that “not until Song did the lineage begin to assume its present form; not until then did the keeping of genealogies as we know them today commence.”

Many southern families of Han people, including Hakka, today trace their genealogy to the year 1126 when the capital Kaifeng, Henan, fell to the Liao (Qidan) of the Tartar dynasty and Gao Zong established the Southern Song in Hangzhou, Zhejiang.

Certain Hakka claim their original homeland, a northern one, was abandoned when the barbarians invaded, but not all of these migrants from north China were Hakka people.

Some Hakka also claim to be the “original Chinese,” stemming from the home province of Henan and asserting their speech is closest to the “old Han spoken language,” Han hua (the mother tongue of the Han people). However, many scholars today believe that a minority trying to free itself from discrimination will make these claims in order to be associated with Chinese people and therefore not a minority. Perhaps out of fear of being labeled as non-Chinese, the target of Chinese persecution, a sinicized minority would put on the mask of Chinese patriotism to save their own necks. This is the survival tactic of a greatly outnumbered minority in the face of the Chinese majority attempting to drive them out of a mutually shared land.

There is no doubt the Hakka belong to a partially sinicized minority, according to Kiang. They have political ambition to rule China, and for the convenience of politics in larger geographic areas they tend to acquiesce in their ethnic identification as one of the majority. On the other hand, they are regarded as an ethnic and social “out-group,” and their different language, behaviors, characters, habits, and modes of life made them unable to mix or assimilate with the Chinese majority.

Moreover, according to several reports, some ethnic groups of northern people traceable to Hakka origins are still scattered in such remotely isolated areas as Urga (Ulan Bator, Kulun) of Mongolia, Liaoning of Manchuria, Shandong, Shanxi, Hebei, Henan, Shaanxi, Hubei, and Anhui. These northern minority groups of that descent do not acknowledge or define the term Hakka or Hakkanyin, but their languages are very similar

to that of the Hakka in the south. Undoubtedly they are the direct descendants of the original group who migrated into the central plains from Mongolia.

This evidence further suggests that the use of the term *Hakka* or *Hakkanyin* is a result of their migration into the south where southern Chinese have called them Hakka, guest people. In the Tang dynasty, Hakka in the south began using this term to describe themselves.²³

Theories of Hakka Origins

The story of early Hakka occupation in north China probably never will be told. There are no historical documents to substantiate a particular theory regarding their origins. During the past one and a half centuries, many scholars turned to the only known historically written sources that might yield clues or facts about Hakka. As a result of past research, there are several theories explaining the origin and history of the Hakka. These findings need further investigation in order to arrive at an accurate conclusion. The theories most widely held among scholars include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Hakka are descendants of Mongol garrison soldiers.²⁴
2. Hakka are descended from Yi in north China at the end of the Zhou dynasty.²⁵
3. Hakka are direct descendants of the half million soldiers dispatched by Qin Shi Huang Di to the south.²⁶
4. Hakka are descended from the remnants of the Yueh Kingdom, which was destroyed by the Zhu Kingdom in the year 333 BCE.²⁷

5. Hakka are descendants of the original Han Chinese migrating from the northern plains of China during the Jin and Tang dynasties.²⁸

According to Russian anthropologist S. M. Shirokogoroff, Hakka do not resemble at all type A (Chinese) and seem to be physically close to the types common among the eastern and Guandong Chinese. They were overwhelmingly descended from the northern people with type B in Shandong, Shanxi, and Shaanxi. Shirokogoroff goes on to describe:

The ancestors of Hakka in Shantung, and even in Shansi, did not belong to the type A, but they were aborigines (type B, whose traces I have shown in Shantung) and were expelled by the Chinese from Shantung owing to their difference from the Chinese settlers (type A) who descended down the plain of the Yellow River from the upper course.²⁹

Shirokogoroff points out that the geographical distribution of the type B is very wide. This is a very ancient type that formerly populated the east of Asia. It is found in a great majority among the eastern Chinese, especially Jiangsu and Zhejiang; among Koreans and Japanese; in a lesser degree among the northern Chinese; and also among the Cantonese (Guandongese). In general, it is more common around the China Sea and also spreads along the valley of the Yangtze River. In Manchuria, it is numerous and is found among the northern Tungus. To sum up his findings, Shirokogoroff gives the following conclusions, drawn from the analysis of anthropological data regarding the ethnic movements:

I have supposed type B to be one of the fundamental types of eastern China and Guangdong, also Koreans; its influence is evident in Manchuria; it spreads in the Smurland and . . . in Japan, Mongolia, and Siberia. The present ethnical groups, including this type, speak various languages of entirely different origin, as Giliak, Koreans, non-Mandarin Chinese, Japanese, Mongol, Tungus, and, maybe, Annamite. On the other

hand its influence falls among the groups which speak mandarin, Mongol, Tungus.³⁰

Shirokogoroff suggests the term *Paleoasiatics* to explain the presence of this type among distinct ethnic groups. They originally occupied the coastal regions and archipelagos of eastern and southeastern Asia. Since the Zhou dynasty, the Chinese had entered into close contact with the population of Anhui and Jiangsu provinces and little by little assimilated them. However, some of the early aborigines preserved their original languages. In the course of its history, China has culturally assimilated many peoples of different ethnic roots. When barbarian people come into contact with people of a higher civilization, most likely they first imitate the superior culture while retaining their own hardness. In consequence, they absorb new culture but lose their own vitality. Shirokogoroff depicts the role that type B people have played in the process of cultural assimilation in this way:

In (type B people) was rather sedentary in China and neighboring regions and has been assimilated culturally and amalgamated anthropologically by the active type A (Chinese) and type Delta (Mongols and Manchus). The degrees of assimilation and amalgamation are different in various parts of this area. For instance, this type is completely assimilated and amalgamated in northern China, but it is not amalgamated in eastern and southern China and it is only partly assimilated, even rather influenced, in Korea and some parts of southern Asia.³¹

Hakka are a migratory people, now mostly in southern China. The native Chinese majority generally did not migrate to new lands in ancient times because there was no pressing need for them to seek a living far from home. Another important fact is people of the same ethnic background migrated together in ancient days in order to struggle for survival in a new hostile environment. The question regarding the origin of the Hakka still remains a puzzle.

There is no written account of these various theories about the Hakka's earliest beginnings. Hakka may be understood in the context of a much wider phenomenon in terms of the colonization of the entire far eastern region and parts of the southern region by Tungusic ancestry. Hakka appear to be a mixture of Tungus and Paleoasiatic groups. We still cannot rule out the probability that Hakka are descendants of this group since they all occupied the regions of Shandong and Shanxi at the same period. The following quotation describes Shirokogoroff's view of the original settlement of the Tungusic and Paleoasiatic groups:

The Tungus were previously living in a country with a very mild climate. Manchuria, however, even its southern part, cannot be considered as such. Thus, the country of Tungus origin must lie southward from Manchuria, i.e., in present China. . . . On the other hand, it is beyond any doubt that a Paleoasiatic group lived in the territory of North China at a very late period, e.g., the Chow (Chou) dynasty and perhaps later, and their traces are also found among the Chinese. According to my hypothesis the Paleoasiatic groups occupied the coastal region of China while the territory west from it was occupied by the pro-Tungus.³²

It is highly plausible that the Hakka are descendants of the people broadly categorized as the Huns from Central Asia. The Huns, a member of a savage Asiatic people, were a nomadic, Mongolian race from north-central Asia. In China they are generally identified with the Xiongnu, whom Chinese sources described as originally living in the southern part of the Gobi and what is now Gansu province. But the mountain range of Tian Shan (or Celestial Mountains of Central Asia; in their language called Jilien, signifying Heaven or the Celestial) in Kirghiz Russia and northern Xinjiang formed the center of their country. Organized into hordes, they were indomitable horsemen living off the countries they ravaged.

The first significant migration of the Huns from Central Asia appears to have taken place about the dawn of the western era at a time when the Chinese power was also in the ascendant and the Great Wall was being constructed. The Chinese power of resistance forced the migration to head toward the northwest region away from China and into the Russian steppes.

In the center of Mongolia is the Gobi Desert, one of the world's largest deserts, and around it is a halo of insufficient rainfall and sparse vegetation. Further, the desert region is circled by grassy steppe country unsuitable for agriculture.

South of the Gobi is Inner Mongolia. It is a geographical frontier region between desert and steppe in the north and an agricultural settlement in the south. The crescent region of Inner Mongolia extending from Manchuria to Gansu and Xinjiang offers not much better land for agriculture. To the Mongols, these environmental conditions forced them to choose a nomadic way of life, and the fertile land along the Yellow River was a constant temptation and a source of supply over the centuries. It was this reason that brought them south to raid or settle.

Kiang explains that there are no written records of the first Hun migration from their Central Asian homeland around the first or second millennium BCE. Some scholars believe that their original homeland was most likely located somewhere in the Trans-Caspian steppes. Sometime in the first half of the second millennium BCE, they began to migrate eastward and eventually reached a site on the central Asiatic steppes. From this central Asiatic Altaic homeland, they subsequently split up the original community into various broad subgroups and resumed further migration.

As the centuries passed, these further subdivided into scores of new language groups. Ancestors of the Tungusic groups appear to have been the first of the subgroups to migrate into northeast Asia. The Tungusic tribes are nomads of a different type. They belonged to the hunting, fishing, and forest-roving order of primitive people. Some scholars believe that Hakka are direct descendants from this group, scattering in certain spots of north China in the fourth century BCE. For the most part the Hakka migrations were probably not great exoduses but rather gradual encroachments as each new generation sought new pasture and hunting areas. Over the millennia they spread over wide regions, reaching China from north to south.

The Asiatic Huns first appeared in China in the fourth century BCE, before the Great Wall of China was built to contain them. In fact, strong Hun tribes were established for a long time in the Tian Shan and dominated the trade-route region from Gansu province to Qumul (Hami), Tulufan, and Wulumuqi. Their semi-sinicized descendants as a minority occupied and ruled north China from the third century BCE to 581 CE. The actual frontier of China fluctuated from time to time. It depended upon the amount of pressure that came alternatively from the Chinese to the south or the barbarians to the north and northwest of the Great Wall. At different times invaders established non-Chinese kingdoms in Gansu, Shaanxi, Shanxi, Shandong, and Hebei (Zhili). Some of the barbarian power penetrated farther into China and resulted in the founding of dynasties that controlled the entire country. Evidently nomadic peoples overcame the military barrier of the Great Wall. On the Chinese side of the Great Wall they adapted their own social order based on the civilization of tilled fields and walled cities. "They have always faced about to defend it, and they have tended to become

merged in the civilization they found within it.” They all became native people or Chinese in the lands where everything was considered native or Chinese in spite of differences in language and ethnic background.³³

Why was the Hakka’s true identity kept in the dark? The answer may be that Xiongnu was the long-standing invader and arch-enemy of the Chinese majority over the centuries. As descendants of the sinicized Xiongnu, Hakka find it necessary and convenient to hide this identity. They sparsely settled in the Shandong and Shanxi region by the fourth century BCE, particularly in the kingdom of Ji. After the defeat of Ji and the unification of Qin, they migrated chiefly southward and westward. Some went north to settle in Korea. Many others joined Hsu Fu’s eastward expedition (migration to Japan). The fact that there are similarities in characters among these three peoples explains why they were racially akin to each other.

The constant wars during the Warring States periods gradually led to the creation of China’s larger territorial country through the conquest of many alien kingdoms and the extension of central authoritarian control over the entire region of China.

The ethnic and historical evidence seem to substantiate that Hakka are descendants of the sinicized southern Huns (Han, related to Tungusic people) because their direct ancestors ruled China in the Han dynasty, which was named after their own Han tribe. Historical evidence from Sima Jian’s *Shi Ji (The Historical Records)* further suggests that some of them were forced to relocate to south China by the First Emperor in the 210s BCE.

Liu Pang was a soldier of fortune and a commander of the forces of one of the chiefs. He ordered troops to support his revolutionary cause. Passages from the *Hou Han*

shu (*The Book of the Later Han Dynasty*) provide glimpses into who composed the barbaric Han (Hakka) people among Liu Pang's uprising troops that brought about the downfall of the Chin dynasty. When the Han's ancestor (Liu Pang) relied on the sword to establish the dynasty, the teachings of men of arms flourished. The laws were abroad and distant, and the rites of civilization concise and summarized. They inherited the violent brilliance of the "Four Princes," who were famous for gathering retainers. They appear as the models for the spirit and ethic of the "wandering swordsmen," so people harbored thoughts of bullying their superiors. They regarded death lightly and emphasized fighting spirit, and any wrong or favor would invariably be paid. The laws came from "private" courts, and power shifted to commoners. The practices of the "swordsmen" became their customs.³⁵

At the time when Liu Pang was struggling to establish the Han dynasty, many Hakka soldiers, the wandering swordsmen, played a pivotal role in the uprising battles. After the founding of the dynasty, Liu Pang was obliged to parcel out a measure of regional power to his relatives and companions-in-arms as rewards for their contributions to the Han victory. So the rank and file were bestowed with the titles of dukes and lords in official recognition, and were allocated lands for their jurisdiction.

It was common practice for the Hakka to adopt surnames of well-known clans or their leaders in association with certain virtues, places, events or achievements, official positions, and natural objects. Some Hakka even claimed Liu Pang as one of their own ethnic group. Many Hakka assert that they were direct descendants of prominent officials or great families of the Han dynasty. As a result, the overwhelming adoption of Chinese surnames began during the Han period and a great majority of them became nobility, the

ruling elite. Apparently there was a tendency on the part of the Hakka minority to become much more recognized by the Chinese majority through imperial and noble connections. It is possible that the increasing use of Chinese genealogical records helped to build up further clan connections.

Most likely, the clan line among the Hakka was claimed and augmented by plagiarizing existing Chinese family names. To cite a practice of the Han dynasty, in the reign of Jing Di (156–140 BCE), Han's armies were overwhelmingly Mongolian. When Mongolian chieftains brought their mounted troops to surrender to the Chinese forces, Emperor Jing Di as usual incorporated these barbarian soldiers into his military forces. The barbarian leaders in return were rewarded with Han titles of nobility, with the result that all the Mongolian soldiers in service took their Chinese names and the Mongolian blood was infused with "pure Chinese" by intermarriage.

Without scientific evidence, we cannot fully explain the genesis of an ethnic group like the Hakka. Names in family records can be misleading in several ways. Many writers on the Hakka have attested to the unreliability of pre-Song family records in which there was a general reconstruction of lineage genealogies following the removal of the Song dynasty to the south. The practice of using a surname or family name can change even within a few generations of a family. Because ancestors could not read and write, the family name would be written in different characters according to the same sound. The surname changes could occur on different occasions—alteration, child or name adoption, marriage, migration, registration, mispronunciation, false identification, use of a new name by choice, granting of a name by officials, and so on.

In ancient times, Chinese families were to choose a name from the *Bai jia xing* (*The Book of Family Names*). Altogether, there are about 438 common Chinese family names (characters) in the *Bai jia xing*, with the result that many millions of different people have identical family names but are not descended from a common ancestor. Not surprisingly, clans of different ethnic roots could carry the same surname. This practice continues to develop, and today there are only about 1,000 Chinese surnames in use. The population growth and increasing movement of the population make it more difficult to pinpoint one's family tree by genealogy. It is therefore rather deluding and difficult, if not unscientific, to search for the recorded and unrecorded past about ethnic roots in the face of a populace in excess of 1 billion people.

According to anthropologist Loring Brace of the University of Michigan, the Ainu, the Japanese, and the Koreans are descendants of the Huns. The ancestors of the present Koreans went to Japan about 2,200 years ago by way of Manchuria, Siberia, and the Korean Peninsula. The Ainu, the first inhabitants of the islands, came to the Japanese archipelago settlement about ten thousand to fifteen thousand years ago, before the ancestors of the present Koreans did. They came through Siberia, along the Amur, crossing the Sakhalin straits, then to Hekkaido and further spreading into the southern islands. The migration to Japan of the Ainu was made possible by land connections to continental Asia in the last Ice Age. After the land was completely cut off from the continent, the movement of the Hunnish people continued towards and through Korea.

The great majority of the people of Japan today are descended from Mongolians who migrated into the area about 2,000 years ago. The migrations to Japan came from the Asian continent chiefly by way of the Korean peninsula, but also from the south. The

Jo Fuku (Hsu Fu) people, one of the migrating contingents, who migrated to Japan from Shandong in 219 BCE, are also descendants of semi-sinicized southern Huns who previously settled in the Ji kingdom of north China. About 2,200 years ago, they split from the original Han (later called Hakka in south China) family group in the central plains and went to Japan, where they formed Yamato.

As the spread of rice culture was changing the face of the islands, the Yamato people laid the foundation for social change that would alter the lifestyle of their people by the sixth century CE. In the course of two thousand years of living side by side in the islands that we call Japan, the Ainu, the ancient Koreans, the Malay stock, and the Yamato including Jo Fuku people in particular were assimilated to such a great extent that a new Japanese society was formed.

For centuries migratory groups left Central Asia and southern North Asia. Turkic migrations away from the homeland probably took place after the Chinese campaigns to destroy the Hun Empire around the years 104–101 BCE. In the middle of the fourth century CE, the Huns dominated a large area around the Aral Sea in present Russia, and about 372 CE, the Huns (c. 372–453) in the west, led by their great leader Attila, invaded the Volga valley, destroyed the kingdoms of the Goths in the Ukraine, and overran the plain of Hungary. They migrated further westward in Europe in the fourth and fifth centuries CE. This movement led the waves of migration that destroyed the Roman Empire in 476 CE.

Attila, king of the Huns, was called the Scourge of God by the Europeans. Grata, the sister of Emperor Palestinian III, secretly offered herself in marriage to Attila. In response, he ordered the dowry to be half of the Western Empire. With his subject

peoples, he went on to invade Gaul (today's France) and Northern Italy. His invasions finally ended in 451. His subject peoples revolted and defeated the Hunnish kingdom in 453 after his death. Some Huns mixed with various racial strains of Europe, and the early Kkans of Bulgaria claimed they were descendants of one of Attila's sons.³⁶

The Waves of the Hakka Diaspora

A number of Hakka scholars organize the Hakka diaspora into five waves. This method provides a more organized timeline for those newer to Hakka studies. Since early historical times, the Hakka were nomadic people. Along their many adventures, encounters with residents of the lands they crossed ranged from peaceful to acts of murder. During peaceful times, the Hakka and the other parties traded or made economic and political agreements, such as intermarriage, that benefited all parties involved. Other times the Hakka employed violence and battled in war to achieve their goals.

The history of the Hakka reflects a cyclical drama of invasion, devastation, migration, progress, prosperity, famine, oppression, anarchy, war, decay, and again migration. Many native Chinese held the view that "there was the extreme traditional repugnance toward migration and the stigma of their despair and defeat attached to the permanent abandonment of the ancient home."³⁷ The Hakka generally did not hold this view. Instead, they viewed migration as an opportunity to empower and better themselves.

The Hakka did not view a place as their home until they built a Hakka community and had settled in the area for a significant amount of time. There is a strong emphasis on family bonds and the importance of friendship in Hakka culture. They

stayed connected to other Hakka they may have left behind and who may eventually have joined them in the “new” lands. They did not want to move everyone to a particular region until the new home was established. The Hakka live all over the world today; Hakka communities are located in Meinong Village in Gaoxiong, Taiwan as well as many countries abroad. The Hakka face the challenge of maintaining their distinctiveness, but there is certainly an emphasis passed on from the older to the younger generations to preserve Hakka culture.

British anthropologist Buxton describes some of the settlements of the Hakka in his narrative account in *The Peoples of Asia*:

The Hakka . . . are found principally in Kwantung and Kwangsi, but they occur in small and somewhat scattered groups in Fukien, Kiangsi, Chekiang, and even in the islands of Formosa and Hainan. It seems clear that they originally inhabited Shantung, Shanxi, and Anhui. In the third century B.C. they were driven from Shantung, and over six hundred years later they were driven further south into the mountains, this time still further south into the Fukien's Mountains and the ranges between Kiangsi and Kwantung. Finally, in the fourteenth century, they were driven from Fukien and eventually settled in the north of Kwantung. They spread to the south-west of that province and also into Kwangsi.³⁸

Similarly, Russian anthropologist Shirokogoroff shares his depiction of the Hakka diaspora:

According to their tradition they came from Shantung and Shansi to the basin of the Yangtze River (in the third century before Christ), whence they moved into the mountains of Kiangsi and Fukien (in the fifth century of our era); from these regions they went to southern ranges which separate Guangdong and Kiangsi from Fukien (in the seventh century); then they played a very important part under the Sung dynasty (in the thirteenth century) and during the Yuan dynasty they spread over Guangdong. Everywhere they left some traces of their presence. Their migrations are explained by themselves as involuntary ones, due to the disfavor of different dynasties. Lastly, they took a very important part in the Taiping rebellion and formed a leading center of this movement. They also are inclined to migration and give a high percentage among emigrants

leaving China for southern ports and the Pacific. Some authors have been inclined to consider them as born vagabonds.³⁹

Many scholars have asked why the Hakka left north China in the first place. This question led to the questioning of what was happening in north China at that time that encouraged or forced the Hakka to leave. Most scholars argue that the Hakka migrated when they were enduring sufferings and hardships caused by Chinese feudalism and political corruption. Their destitution encouraged them to seek a new home. The Hakka yearned for equality, freedom, and new opportunities and these desires propelled them to undertake a socioeconomic and political campaign. The Hakka migration holds certain features. They migrate in groups of friends and relatives to empower themselves in terms of number. In many cases, the physically stronger members of the group begin the initial migration. They strategize as to how they will overcome the new environments and peoples before they begin their journey. The Hakka are also a culturally focused group; even though they have migrated for the past two millennia, their ethnic, religious, and social practices still survive today. Kiang regards the Hakka as living examples of the “survival of the fittest” by viewing “the world is our home” and being dedicated “citizens of the world.”⁴⁰

There were waves of Hakka migration in the past two thousand years. The first wave is the period from 249–209 BCE. The Huns first became a threat to China around 400 BCE. During the fifth century BCE the Huns were known to the Chinese as Xiongnu, the steppe people to the west and north of China. During this period Xiongnu formed a powerful coalition of tribes in central Asia on the northwest frontier of China. The invasions from the north by this nomadic cattle-raising tribe were so frequent that the first Great Wall was originally built to contain them before the third century BCE.

However, the Hunnish incursions continued, and finally the single magnificent structure that exists to this day was extended and completed in 214 BCE by the First Emperor, Jin Shi Huang Di. To the Chinese, the Great Wall was also an instrument of their expansion and stabilization. But to the ethnic peoples of north China, it prevented the existence of a settled population no less than the eruption of mobile tribesmen.

The First Emperor was the king of Jin. Much of what came to constitute China proper was unified by 221 BCE for the first time under the feudal state of Jin, whose people were descended from an uncertain mixture of Chinese, Tibetan, and Mongolian stock. Many of them are not quite pure Chinese, and the Zhou dynasty had always regarded them as semibarbarous. Neighboring non-Chinese peoples of various kingdoms or countries were forced to accept Jin rule.

The First Emperor was probably the cruelest ruler in Chinese history. It is recorded that approximately one million and a half humans died during his rule. In order to strengthen his control, the First Emperor persecuted the great feudal families by forcing 120,000 members to relocate from their old kingdoms to Xian, the new capital. Under harsh and cruel Jin rule, any person breaking the law was sent to labor on the Great Wall. Without mercy, hundreds of thousands of workers were so mobilized to construct the Great Wall in agony and sweat, and prisoners of war from the conquered kingdoms were pressed into service. Consequently, 1 million people died toiling on the construction. Historians describe the core of the Great Wall labor force as an army of three thousand men under the command of Meng Dian, "Conqueror of the Tartars."⁴¹ But the total number of men who slaved and died on the Wall must have been over a million. Overall, Jin's cruelty and tyranny proved extremely unpopular, resulting in a short-lived

dynasty, less than twenty years. The old kingdoms still yearned for independence, and many of the kingdoms rose in revolt when the son of the First Emperor succeeded him.

The first wave of the Hakka's diaspora, according to the historical investigations by J. D. Ball and E. J. Eitel, occurred when Han peoples (Hakka's ancestors) in Shandong, oppressed by the Jin dynasty, migrated into Henan, Anhui, Jiangxi, and other provinces in the third century BCE. During the Chin dynasty (221–207 BCE) of the First Emperor, the term *Hakka* was not yet in use in north China. Although there was a claim that the name *Hakka* appeared in historical records, this writer was unable to substantiate the evidence.⁴²

At this time, the Hakka experienced bloody persecution. The First Emperor ordered wholesale removal of populations and they migrated for survival; there was no other pressing reason for migration among the settled peoples of the north at this time. Persecution is one of the methods used to prevent uprisings. Distant lands could not offer what the empire of China already had or could easily obtain within the boundary. As wanderers without a home, they fled toward the south in Henan and Anhui and a small number went as far south as Jiangxi. Some clans changed their names to avoid recognition.

The Historical Records (Shi ji) of historian Sima Jian (145–86 BCE) was completed shortly after 100 BCE. Sima Jian also argues that the First Emperor had forced half a million Hakka to perform military service in the south across the Chang Jiang basin in 214 BCE. Hakka in the North River region of Guangdong are the descendants of these soldiers. Zhang Kiuling, who was prime minister of a Tang emperor, was a descendant of these soldiers.

During the Han dynasty many Hakka held high official posts because the descendants of the Huns ruled China. In particular, early in the Han dynasty (202 BCE to 190 CE), they became “virtual masters of the Empire.”⁴³

In the third century BCE, the Hunnish invaders from the northwest or north continually raided the central plains of north China. The Great Wall was, in fact, constructed to defend against them. These raiders (Hakka’s immediate ancestors) were “stuck” in the central plains after the construction completed. The steppe peoples had settled in the central plains before the Great Wall’s completion. They became sinicized and gained the new status of guest people. Kiang argues that there are records that these northern invaders were related to the Hakka whom Jin Shi Huang Di.

In addition to political and ethnic persecution, peoples of north China have endured natural catastrophes like famine. During the third and second centuries BCE the old documents record, one of the worst famines in the history of north China took place. This famine motivated the Hakka to migrate southward across the Great River (the Chang Jiang River).

In 206 BCE the Han dynasty was founded by one of the Han leaders of the marauding armies that first defeated the Jin regime. The new emperor made many of his henchmen rulers of the old kingdoms. Several of the kingdoms rose in revolt, but the new government was able to crush them.

The steppe peoples moved eastward from China towards the isles of the blessed, also known as the islands in the east. This group was referred to as the Yi or Dong Yi. They were regarded as barbarians and lived in the Shandong peninsula during ancient times. There is a popular legend that is documented in the *Shi ji* (*The Historical*

Records), which tells the story of Jin Shi Huang Di pleasuring himself with three thousand concubines after he defeated all the kingdoms in China. To bring him everlasting life, he dispatched Hsu Fu (Jo Fuku, in Japanese) in search of the elixir of immortality (which is also called Daoist aphrodisiac) on three mythical islands off the Shandong coast, where dwelt the Immortal Spirits. This searching expedition took place in 219 BCE, three years after Jin's unification of China. *The Historical Records* described the ascent of Mount Tai by the first Jin emperor for religious purposes and his search for immortality from the Isles of the Blessed (Penglai).

Hsu, an ancient explorer and the Daoist emissary, claimed he had personally visited these islands and learned that the Immortals would share the elixir formula if they receive countless virgin youths and maidens of good family in advance. Hsu and his people from the kingdom of Ji were semi-sinicized descendants of the Huns, the Mongolian people. They also called themselves the Han people, an ethnic minority who split up into subgroups from north China during this period, resulting in the Koreans in the north, Hakka in the south, and Yamato (Japanese) in the East. Hsu and his three thousand "boys and girls," youths and maidens, boarded several ships, sailed eastward from Lang Ya in Shandong, and landed at Kumano in present Wakayama (Kinodo, Kishu) prefecture. They never returned and were never heard from again. Some say they went via Manchuria and the Korean Peninsula, reaching Japan in 217 BCE in a party of 554 people. This writer is convinced that they became inhabitants of Japanese islands and conquered and possibly amalgamated the aborigines. It is difficult to prove this theory due to events such as the book burning of Jin Shi Huang Di in 213 BCE.

Kiang argues that Hsu was aware the Japanese archipelago. They used this knowledge to plan an escape from the tyrannical rule. Their location was not disclosed because they feared Jin invasion and punishment for their escape. At that time, the First Emperor had to approve emigration or the violator would receive the punishment of death.

Research has shown that the Yamato clan, the Japanese group with the largest population, most probably are descendants of the Jo Fuku group.⁴⁴ Together with the indigenous tribes, the Ainu and the Maylay stock, they occupied the islands as the ruling elite for thousands of years and developed into the elaborately organized and highly sophisticated society of contemporary Japan. We began to see the presence of Yayoi culture (ca. 300 BCE–ca. 300 CE) in southwest Japan in the third century BCE. They had a unique culture, and “its most notable elements were probably brought to the islands by migrants fleeing political turmoil on the continent.”⁴⁵ The Jo Fuku group, agricultural people who farmed rice primarily, arrived in Japan around the year 217 BC. Their descendants migrated northeastward and southward in search of more land necessary to sustain a growing population. Most strikingly, the new warfare of fighting men on horses made its appearance. They were from the Asian continent, the Jo Fuku people, who brought with them continental weaponry. The Yayoi period was distinguished by the introduction of agriculture and metal implements from the Asian continent, the importation of Chinese cultures to the Japanese archipelago at some time between the third century BCE and the second century CE, and the subsequent modification of newly acquired elements. The use of metal implements including both bronze and iron constituted the abrupt entry of Japan into the Iron Age, which in turn made it possible to

achieve superior craftsmanship of their own. There are historical records that chronicle the exploits of the pioneer Yamato armies and their struggle against the Ainu, the first-wave settlers, in northeastern Japan. Subsequently within some four centuries, Yayoi customs had spread and displaced older Jomon culture, and the Yamato pioneers had covered much of what is Japan today. This is the story of how a horse-riding people from the Asian continent migrated and established themselves in Japan.⁴⁶

Based on recordings in the *Kojiki* (*Record of Ancient Matters*, 712 CE) and *Nihon shoki* (*Chronicle of Japan*, 720 CE), the Japanese imperial line is believed to have begun with Emperor Jimmu (Jimmu Tenno). This inception produced rites and rituals. This commemoration in the annual Kigensetsu rite was thought to have occurred 2,650 years earlier when he began to reign in 660 BCE. These are possible early dates, but the first eight successors of Jimmu Tenno with an average reign of 109 years each are absolutely conjectural. Some historians even doubt that Jimmu Tenno actually existed. But his tomb remains in the conquered province of Yamato, northeast of Mount Unebi. His date of accession, February 11, is the day observed as the birthday of the empire.⁴⁷

The most important texts for pre-Nara Japanese studies are the *Kojiki* and *Nihon shoki*. Ono Yasumaro (?–723 CE) assembled the *Kojiki*. This collection of literature covers Japanese “history” from the “age of the gods” to the seventh century. The objective of this assembly was to validate the powers given to imperial rule and to empower the imperial line. Prince Toneri (676–735 CE) composed the *Nihon shoki*, which is regarded as the oldest historical text on Japan. Similarly, the text was employed to justify imperialism and nationalism after 1868, the time of the Meiji Restoration, until

the end of World War II. Scholars, however, argue that these collections are both untrustworthy.

Terao defends that a number of Chinese, Japanese, and Korean reports argue Jo Fuku is Jimmu Tenno.⁴⁸ On the old epitaph of Hsu's gravestone, four Chinese characters concisely state "Jin Hsi Fu ze mu"; this tomb is located at Shinnomiya (Shingu) in Wakayama prefecture. The stone tablet was inscribed and erected there by order of the first Tokugawa feudal lord in the seventeenth century, and the Chinese characters were written by a Korean named Li Meiji in the same period. After so many centuries, how could one be sure that this site was the tomb of Hsu Fu or Jimmu Tenno?

The "Jinnoki" exists in ancient records and similar literature and has been translated into Chinese, Korean, and English. The story, written in Chinese by Jo Fuku nine hundred thirty years before the *Kojiki*, describes the kingdom of Ugaya in Central Asia where the journey of the ancestors of Jo Fuku began. It is the history of the Ugaya Kingdom that had existed before the Emperor Jimmu in Central Asia. This historical document substantiates the scientific findings of Dr. Hideo Matsumoto's investigation that the Japanese roots arose from Central Asia. These accounts of the Jinnoki were suppressed and prohibited from circulation by the imperial family and the government of Japan before World War II because the ruling elite made all efforts to conceal the true origin of the imperial house for the purpose of perpetuating the myth of divinity.⁴⁹

The Jin dynasty's First Emperor and Korei (290–215 BCE) were contemporaries. The arrival of Hsu Fu fits in with that time frame. His arrival was mentioned in *Jinno shoto ki* in 1339. It is possible that some of the records regarding this event were condemned by the Japanese imperial family. For example, *Jinno shoto ki* states that the

books describing the same ethnic roots of Japanese and Koreans were ordered to be destroyed at the time of Emperor Kammu. According to *Honcho tsuki* of 1698, Hsu paid tribute to Emperor Korei by presenting a Chinese historical book, *San huang wu di*, the emperor Korei allowed Hsu and his people to stay in Japan.⁵⁰ Historian James Murdoch asserts that some centuries later there were over seven thousand families in the Kawachi area engaging in sericulture. They regarded themselves as descendants of the Han people who had migrated to escape the tyranny of Jin Shi Huang Di.⁵¹

Further, the first statement regarding the Japanese appears in the historical documents from the first century CE during the Western (Earlier) Han dynasty, the era that succeeded the Jin dynasty. The description states that the barbarians in the east are docile and obedient by nature. Later Chinese references to Japan can be found in the *Chronicles of the Later Han Dynasty (Hou Han shu)*. Japan was then referred to as the country of the people of Wa. In 57 CE during the Eastern (Later) Han dynasty, King Nu of Wa received a gold seal from a Chinese Emperor Guan Wu Di.⁵² The gold seal was found in Hakata on the northwest coast of Kyushu, and its inscription (Han Ai Nu guo wang) implies that King Nu of Wa (King of the kingdom of Ainu) was a vassal of Han. The King of Nu sent an ambassador to pay homage to the emperor at Loyang, capital of the Han. He responded by giving a seal confirming his kingship in the name of the Han dynasty. A Chinese record of 107 CE states that 160 slaves were received from a Wa ruler. In the second century CE, there was a mention of 100 countries of Wa.

In the Han dynasty, Japan was known to the Celestials (Han people) as “wo,” the character originally pronounced as “ai” or “wa” in Japanese. The Tang people called the region of Japan Ri Ben, “sun’s source,” or “the Land of Sunrise,” in geographical

connotation. The Japanese adopted this name and pronounced it Nihon or Nippon. In the seventh and eighth centuries, Japan was regarded as “Zhugogu” China, or the Middle Kingdom. It is assumed that they acknowledged that their ancestors migrated from China and thought of Japan as a “miniature China.” It is common for migrants to name their new place after their previous home. A majority of the Japanese claim their Mongolian ancestry. They understand the difference between the ethnic Han people and the Chinese majority, whom they called Shinajin in the twentieth century prior to World War II. The term *Shinajin*, the men (jin) of Shina (Tschina), came from the European usage of Tschina (China).

There are still historical and genealogical records that trace the actual location of the arrival of Jo Fuku’s party in Japan, and a number of Japanese places and surnames reflect their name and memory. Japanese surnames such as Fukuda, Fukui, Fukukawa, Fukuhara, Fukushige, Fukushima, Fukuwara, Fukuzawa, and so forth, even the full name Jofuku are all named after Jo Fuku as their ancestors migrated from Central Asia via north China around the Yayoi period in Japan’s history. The evidence of the records proves that the Jo Fuku group was a Han (Mongolian) tribe in origin. Their mother tongue in Altaic roots is unrelated to Chinese but they later used Chinese characters for written communication.

The Jo Fuku group and the Hakka belong to the same ethnic Han tribe more than twenty-two hundred years ago. The native chronicles record the arrival of hundreds of households of “men of [Jin]” and “men of Han.” These émigrés continued to arrive during the fifth and sixth centuries in different contingents.⁵³ For this reason, the Japanese have formed the Hakka Study Society in Japan to promote the preservation of

these historical records and increase interest in the study of this history. Some clans have kept their genealogies, in which are noted the migrations of the family tracing back to Jo Fuku. The Japanese therefore acknowledge they are descendants of Mongolian ancestry, not Chinese, chiefly because their ancestors, the Jo Fuku group and other Han people including ancient Koreans, originated from Mongolia in Central Asia.

In 1966 Dr. Hideo Matsumoto confirmed this theory by DNA research. He discovered the first scientific evidence that Japanese contain ABST, AG, and AxG types of genes that are identical to Mongolians from the Lake Baikal region of Central Asia. His research offers evidence to date that migration from the Asian continent to Japan took place. He suggests the first migration from Central Asia probably took place twelve or thirteen thousand years ago, and subsequent, steady migrations of the same ethnic group continued from the Asian continent to the Japanese archipelago.⁵⁴ He further confirms the Japanese carry genes that are slightly different from Koreans and the Han people of the north, but greatly different from southern Chinese.

His findings do not fully explain the true origins of the Japanese but offers genetic clues. No doubt through the application of the new techniques of analyzing DNA, one of the most exciting fields of modern biological science, more can be learned about the genetic affinity of the Hakka and Japanese. Such scientific research may throw more valuable light on the historical separation of the two peoples in the third century BCE—the migration of the Hakka from the north into the south as well as that of the Japanese ancestors from the north to the fairy island (Penglai siendao) of the east, and the similar group characteristics of the two peoples. After more than two thousand years of

geographic separation no definite answer is possible here, but the general configuration of the answer can be sketched out. It opens new doors for scientific, historical research.

The Hakka-Korean Link

Most scholars argue that the Koreans are Altaic people, but most Koreans view themselves as Han or Chinese. *Kija Chosen* is the oldest record of Korean history. Korean historians tell the story of Kija, a member of the Han tribe of the Dong Yi people who migrated to Korea. Kija and his forty-two kings who succeeded him ruled the kingdom of Chosen for nearly one thousand years. However, *The Historical Records* describes Kija as a scion of the Chinese royal house of the Shan (Yin) period. After being overthrown by the Zhou king around 1122 BCE, he migrated to the eastern region with some five thousand followers. He brought Chinese books from China, including *The Book of Odes*, and taught the Koreans how to write Chinese as early as the twelfth century BCE. So the Chinese language was spoken by educated Koreans.⁵⁵

There were several rebellions during the early years after the Han dynasty was established. According to *The Historical Records*, these revolts against the Han dynasty often occurred in northern states within easy reach of the Korean peninsula. Refugees and migrants from the states of Yan, Ji, and Zhao poured into Kija Chosen (Korea) when the revolts were crushed. Wiman (Wei Man), one of these refugees, had been in the service of the kingdom of Yan. He brought about a thousand followers with him to Korea, where he reestablished his political base by becoming commander of troops under the king of Kija Chosen. Eventually he rebelled against his king and became the ruler of Chosen about 194 BCE.

Wiman Chosen challenged the Han dynasty and Emperor Wu of the Han dynasty ordered about thirteen thousand troops to invade. The country was overthrown by the Han Empire of China and replaced by four Chinese colonies in 108 BCE. The region of Korea south of the Han-gang (Han River) was split into three tribal states, Mahan, Chinhan, and Pyonhan. Their three federations held the name of Han before their evolution into three kingdoms, Koguryo, Paekche, and Silla.

The Koreans' pronunciation of Han (Chinese) characters is very similar to the Hakka's indicates these two groups probably absorbed the Han (Chinese) language at approximately the same time. In fact, both Hakka and Korean pronunciation of Han characters more similar than that of Mandarin Chinese.

Hakka are sometimes referred as Ngai Jen (Ngai people) because of their pronunciation of "I" as "Ngai" in their language. The word "Ngai" is definitely related to the Korean word "Na" signifying the pronoun "I." It is frequently argued that Chinese culture reached Japan through the Han colony in Korea during the first century BCE, and there must be trade and communication between the three regions. Anthropologist Buxton describes their interaction: "It must never be forgotten, however, that there is undoubtedly a great connection between Korea and Japan, and that it is more than probable that the Koreans may justly claim Japan as a daughter country."⁵⁶

After the dawn of the Christian era, Yamato's Japan became powerful enough to establish her dominance over the Korean kingdoms. For years the Japanese possessed a part of southern Korea, and "there were frequent movements of Korean emigrants to Japan. The petty Korean states nearest Japan were considered a tributary to the court in Yamato."⁵⁷

DNA research has been able to establish the genetic connection among Koreans, Japanese, and peoples from the north (Hakka) in interpreting and substantiating the historical information. However, this genetic study needs refinement and greater explication. Achieving these goals will move us closer to using genetic data, along with historical documents, to explain the Hakka's migration.

The second wave of migration occurred in 307–419 CE, during a time when the Han Empire crumbled. This collapse left China in pieces with no central authority. This fragmentation led to unsuccessful kingdoms in the south, and without unity China no longer had the strength it once held. It was, however, a great time for others who wanted a piece of China. However, we must point out there was no significant migration during the period. The Han people established their own Celestial Kingdom with its capital at Changan, Henan, where a majority of Hakka people lived from 202 BCE to 220 CE. The unification of China and the tyrannical example of the Jin provided the Han with excellent lessons on how to control the empire and its people. The new kingdom retained much of the Jin administrative system but allowed vassal principalities in some areas without a centralized rule. The empire included Xinjiang and Kirghiz Russia in the modern Xinjiang-Uygur Autonomous Region (the region of the Ural and Altai Mountains), which was the true original homeland of the Hunnish (Hun) people according to some sources.

During the Western Jin dynasty, from the fourth century CE onward, northern China continued to suffer repeated invasions by various northern peoples, and during this period many non-Chinese settled in Chinese territory. Between 280 and 310 CE, severe drought in northern China was so persistent that the natural disaster set off successive

waves of migration toward the south. In the year 298, hundreds of thousands of northerners deserted Gansu and Shaanxi for Sichuan and Henan. During the year 306, almost one-third of a million left Shaanxi for the south. Partly because the Tartars (Tungusic tribes and Xiongnu, cousins and newcomers of the same species of the Huns in Europe) encroached upon the northern plains again in 315 CE, Hakka (the sinicized Huns) were forced to relocate their settlement. They fled from Henan and adjoining areas into Anhui and the vicinity during this period.

In the Yong Jia reign of Huai Di in 307 CE, a relocation center with a system was established to assist immigrants, presumably Hakka. According to many historians, the largest waves of Hakka migration from the north took place during this period, and Hakka apparently became temporary settlers in Anhui within Jin lands. Others moved into the mountainous regions in the southeast of Jiangxi and to the borders of the Fukien province.

Revolts at the end of the Western Jin dynasty (265–317 CE) during the fourth century CE were frequent. According to Wu Xianjing's analysis, three of the five uprisings originated because of feuds between natives and new arrivals driven from their homeland by wars or natural calamities. The fact that famines were prevalent in the northern plains in the fourth and fifth centuries explains the nature of the natural calamities.⁵⁸ These calamities were augmented by the usual facts of government corruption and land concentration in the hands of government officials. The socioeconomic and political upheavals during this period obviously caused the Hakka to migrate from the central plains to the south.

New Altaic peoples appeared on the political scene of China in the north. Xiongnu penetrated north China during the years 311 BCE–17 CE. They took over Loyang and proclaimed a new Han dynasty. This dynasty usually was called the Northern Han, and later the name Zhao was substituted. In order to legitimize their rule, Hunnish conquerors tried to link themselves to the Han dynasty, claiming the same ancestry as the ruling Liu family and taking on Han culture and tradition. The Proto-Mongol and Proto-Turkic Toba established the Northern Wei as their dynasty, controlling much of the Central Plains from 386 to 534 CE. They became completely sinicized by abandoning their own language and national dress.

When the founder of the Eastern Jin dynasty (317–420 CE) made Nanjing his capital, large contingents of Hakka launched waves of a second migration from northern China across the Chiang Jiang River, reaching the mountainous regions in the southeast of Jiangxi and the borders of Fujian.⁵⁹ Approximately 60 percent of the population of northern China crossed the Chang Jiang River into the south. The northern migrants during the Yong Jia period were not exclusively Hakka. They include ancestors of present Hoklos who began to arrive and settle in Fujian. This evidence can be substantiated by their adaption of the name Jin in their new settlements. By the middle of the fifth century, the Hakka were scattered throughout the southern region. In the province of Anhui, there were large numbers of Hakka until the seventh century. Later, they were driven south into the provinces of Fujian and Guangdong. Those Hakka who remained in the north were mostly assimilated into the local populations except for a few who still live in scattered villages in Shanxi, Henan, Hubei, Shaanxi, and Anhui.⁶⁰

The third Hakka migration occurred from 907 to 1280 CE. Between 750 and 1250, China experienced tremendous population growth from 60 million people to 120 million. Also, 73 percent of the population chose to live in the northeast of China during the seventh century, whereas less than 25 percent resided in south and central China. However, by the thirteenth century, the statistics indicate a complete reversal, and the Chang Jiang valley became the country's economic center.

Between 618 and 906 CE, most Hakka lived in the Fujian mountains and some resided in the mountains amid Jiangxi and Guandong.⁶¹ During the second half of the ninth century, the Hakka fled towards Jiangxi due to the Huang Zhao rebellion from 874 to 884 CE. This rebellion caused devastation at the Xian capital.

In 907, China was again left with no central authority when the Tang dynasty disintegrated. During the 907–1280 period, Hakka people in general migrated along the mountains and foothills of eastern Jiangxi into the south and southeast of that province from the lands where Fujian, Guangdong, and Jiangxi meet. They farmed on the hilly lands of that region. During the period of the Five Dynasties from 907–960, the increasing power of nomadic people on China's frontier permitted them to invade and ravage within the borders of China.

In 947, the Qidan (Tartar), under powerful leaders of non-Chinese people, adopted the dynastic name Liao and made their capital Beijing. The non-Chinese country was firmly in control of the northeast region of China. It was then succeeded by the Jin (Tartar) kingdom during the period 1115–1234, culminating with their occupation of Kaifeng in 1127 and their effective settlement in northern China.

The rulers of Liao and Jin were barbarian Tartars, the warlike ancestors of modern Manchus from the north. Constant wars took place between the Chinese and the Tartars. To differentiate the two races, the Tartars compelled the conquered Chinese people to shave their heads. Culturally they had been absorbed into the great mass of human beings behind the Great Wall, but they are genetically different. Hakka came in different contingents from the north at various times.

At this time, more Hakka migrated southward to the border of Jiangxi and Fujian. At the end of the Song dynasty (960–1279) in the thirteenth century, Hakka moved further from Fujian and Jiangxi to settle in the hilly regions of the delta and in the mountainous territory of Canton. As “strangers,” the Hakka distinguished themselves most markedly from their fiercest native rivals, the Cantonese Chinese. Those who traced their arrival from this period referred to themselves as Hakka. The name Hakka was given by natives, or Ben Di, which is the Cantonese term meaning native. The Ben Di, the old established inhabitants, regarded themselves as pure Chinese whose language, Cantonese, most closely resembled the original language of China.

During these political and economic upheavals in the Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), more Hakka embarked on the long, hard trail to the south from Jiangxi and Shandong as the dynasty moved south under the Mongolian threat. In the process of this and earlier migrations, they were well settled in southwestern Fujian near Changting by the early Southern Song dynasty. When the Mongols came into power in 1280, many Hakka, who were soldiers of the Song dynasty, perished. Twice the Mongols entered the prefecture of Jiayinzhou in Guangdong and destroyed the area. In recounting the

economic and political conditions of the Hakka, Leo Moser depicts their fate during the period of the third wave of Hakka migration:

The ancestors of the Hakka remained on lands too poor to share in much of the agricultural propensity of the time. They provided, however, a major portion of the Southern Song armies. As with mountain peoples in other lands and eras, a military career was one of the few available outlets for the ambitious and adventurous. When the Southern Song Empire finally fell to the Mongols, many Proto-Hakka soldiers died with the emperor. In the years to follow, Proto-Hakka families who had lived for some four centuries in eastern Fujian began to depart for Meixian and other nearby parts of Guangdong.⁶²

During the last years of the Song dynasty, Hakka were forced south to Taiwan, Vietnam, and so on. Since the rich lowlands were already occupied, most Hakka became inhabitants of hill country. However, these lands were fertile and they prospered.

The fourth migration occurred between 1281 and 1644 CE. During the thirteenth century the Yuan dynasty (1260–1368) was established. As a result, the Hakka migrated towards and into northeastern Guangdong. A significant Hakka population died fighting for the Song dynasty; others escaped to the Meizhou region. Eastern and northern Guangdong eventually became primarily Hakka areas.

The Yuan was followed by the Ming dynasty (1368–1644). The Ming was a native dynasty, but it was constantly under pressure from the nomads from the north. At the beginning of the Ming dynasty in 1368, the Hakka, after centuries of residence in Fujian, were forced to move. As a result, they migrated to the Meizhou prefecture in the Guangdong province. About the same time, other Hakka from Kiangsi came to settle in the northwest of Fujian. In the sixteenth century, Hakka migrants began to settle in the valley of eastern Guizhou.

During the turn of the seventeenth century, the Hakka moved into the mountain region of the Pearl River Delta. They first were hired laborers but eventually saved enough to purchase land.⁶³ China's population grew from 1368 to 1600. In 1600, the estimated population was 150 million. Population pressure and economic need were two main factors that motivated migrations.

When dynasties changed from Ming to Manchu, many Hakka migrated further to the west and southwest of Guangdong and to the province of Guangxi. They were the last group to surrender to the Manchus. The Manchus came from a small branch of the Tungusic nomads whose immediate ancestors were Nujin Tartars. Belonging to the same group of Mongolian people, Nujin originated from the same region of central Asia.⁶⁴

The seventeenth century saw the end of the Ming dynasty. The Mandate of Heaven passed to the Manchus in 1644. Since the seventeenth century, Hakka colonization continued in the southwestern provinces of Guizhou, Xikang, Yunan, Guangxi, and Sichuan. The Hakka immigrants came from Guangdong or the southeastern provinces of Jiangxi, Hunan, and Fukien.⁶⁵ Due primarily to the population pressures throughout southeast China during the Ming-Qing period, there was an extensive migration of people, both Hakka and non-Hakka, from Fujian and Guangdong to the Chang Jiang highlands.

In 1670 the Hakka accepted the Manchu government's invitation to reclaim and settle empty lands on the coast the Natives (Ben Di) left earlier under a government scheme to remove possible supporters of the Ming dynasty. This resettlement brought them into close and hostile proximity to the native inhabitants. By the end of the

seventeenth century, they migrated in large numbers from the mainland to the islands of Hainan and Taiwan.

The Compatibility of Buddhism and Hakka Adaptation and Transformation

The fifth wave of the Hakka migration occurred after the eighteenth century.

During the eighteenth century, emigration from China was permitted and the Chinese were encouraged by the Dutch to take over the Indonesian islands. At this time, numerous Hakka residing in Guandong and Fukien left for Borneo, Indonesia, Sarawak, and Taiwan. The Hakka were early pioneers in regions considered undesirable, such as Borneo and Sarawak. The Hakka were attracted to areas such as the Sambas and west Borneo because of diamonds and gold. As a result, many Hakka migrated from south China to those regions in the middle of the eighteenth century.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the population of China had reached 300 million, and in the middle of the nineteenth century, the population climbed to over 400 million, having doubled in the course of 150 years since 1700 when China had 200 million people. Emigration abroad was one way to alleviate the domestic pressure of population.⁶⁶ The need for money to buy land was a prime cause of the Hakka going abroad, since they had heard the stories about gold that could be found in great abundance in overseas lands.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the presence of Hakka in increasing numbers in Guandong aroused the displeasure of the local population. Following the Taiping Rebellion, ethnic feuding caused major domestic disruptions. In the late nineteenth century, Hakka continued to be involved in clannish skirmishes with their

neighbors in Canton, as the Cantonese attempted to restrict their activities and to drive them out of the area. This destructive war raged from 1854 until 1868, and many villages were razed to the ground. In 1868, the Hakka, greatly outnumbered, suffered a great loss in their war against the Ben Di (Cantonese), and their women were captured by the Cantonese and sold abroad as servants and prostitutes.⁶⁷ The captured Hakka prisoners were sold off to agents of the “pig trade” to South American or Cuban plantations. At the turn of the century, there were 30,000 Hakka in the Western Hemisphere, partly the residue of the barbarous trade.⁶⁸

Since these two groups could not reconcile their differences, migration was an alternative way of relief from mounting difficulties and sufferings. Hakka managed to preserve their customs and preserve their language throughout their migrations. At this time, some Hakka in Guandong spread from the central and eastern part of China to the less crowded areas of southern regions in Gaozhou, Leizhou, Jinzhou, Lianzhou, and as far as Hainan Island. The migration to Kwangsi took place during the reign of Yong Zheng (1722–1734), and by the middle of the nineteenth century the Hakka outnumbered the local peoples in several districts. “There was much waste-land and untilled mountain valleys which Hakka were hired to till. For generations their descendants multiplied, so that soon they reversed the dominancy of the Ben Di people.”⁶⁹

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, many Hakka migrated to other areas including foreign countries to find work and flee political and economic turmoil. They migrated and established communities throughout the world. Many gathered in Southeast Asia, where they worked in the tin mines, tapped rubber, and engaged in trading through the gongsi (the company) or running small shops. To move south and

overseas was a chance of bettering their living conditions and tiding over the tragic years in China.⁷⁰ The movement out of China was so great that by 1930 more than 8 million Chinese had settled throughout the world. About one-quarter of this migration was Hakka and about three-quarters of the settlers were scattered throughout the East Indies, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Vietnam, and Taiwan.

In the United States, the first immigrant Chinese to land were two men and one woman who arrived in San Francisco on the *Brig Eagle* in 1848.⁷¹ In the 1850s, famine in China triggered an exodus to gold-rush California. Significant immigration, however, did not begin until 1852 when the Chinese population in America reached at least eighteen thousand. By 1860, some thirty-five thousand immigrants from China had arrived in California, mostly to work in the mining camps; one-fourth of them were Hakka. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, limited the number of immigrants from the east. However, between 1850 and 1882 the gold rush in Alaska and California and the construction of railways attracted one hundred thousand Hakka to the United States and they never left.

The fights between Cantonese and Hakka continued in the United States. Hostility and sometimes open violence and vengeance marked their relations during the early period, as in China. Because of the hostile treatment by labor and trade unions, both Cantonese and Hakka have tended to remain concentrated geographically and have maintained cohesive, extended family structures, keeping their connections close and their traditions alive.

In the late 1700s, Hawaii became an important trading post for ships plying between Asia and the Pacific Coast. The growth of agriculture in Hawaii increased

demand for labor. Therefore, Hakka along with Cantonese came in large groups as contract laborers and free immigrants in the late 1800s. The first group of Christian Hakka families arrived in Hawaii in 1878 through the arrangement of Reverend Rudolph Luchler of the Guandong Basel Mission, who recruited a group of Christian Hakka from Bao On district to emigrate. They made a good start in Hawaii, establishing Hakka Lutheran churches, schools, and fraternal organizations. Hakka women were considered especially desirable as workers since they had unbound feet and achieved a considerable degree of literacy. “Exposed to the Western influence, this group stood out in its rapid progress and advancement in the community.”⁷²

Both contract laborers and free immigrants from the Guandong province of China formed their first permanent community in Hawaii. The majority was Cantonese speakers and about one-fourth was Hakka. The population grew from 25,000 in 1900 to 52,000 in 1970, of which about 13,000 were Hakka.⁷³

Hakka began migrating in large groups into Hong Kong in 1840 through 1940. The Hakka have settled for nine centuries in the New Territories, which is as long as the Cantonese have lived there. They also fought for centuries. The fighting has diminished and they now live in the same villages peacefully and intermarriage is frequent.

Hakka were officially authorized and encouraged to emigrate to Taiwan after 1876. Most of the emigrants to Taiwan were from southern Fujian and northeastern Guangdong.

As Hakka migrated overseas, they often took on hard labor or jobs that require special talent or skill. Their occupations ranged from laborer, especially in performing

tasks that natives did not want to perform, to international traders with multi-millionaire status due to their adaptability and ability to learn multiple languages.

Many Hakka migrated to Japan, and it was difficult to distinguish between Hakka and Japanese. The Hakka felt so at home and a part of Japanese culture that many today who grew up in Japan and later immigrated to Taiwan or another country feel they are more Japanese than Chinese. In Japan, a number of Taiwanese Hakka are highly regarded professionals, such as doctors, teachers, business executives, and entrepreneurs.

In Singapore, Hakka are mainly businesspeople in various industries, such as in textiles or Chinese medicine. Hakka composed approximately 6 percent or 132,000 of Singapore's total population in 1980.

In Mauritius, a small island nation in the Indian Ocean, the majority of contemporary Sino-Mauritians (31,000 in 1989, approximately 3 percent of the total population) are descendants of Hakka-speakers from the northeast province of Hunan that arrived in the mid-1780s. Thousands of them were on the island by the end of the nineteenth century, and there has been little immigration since then. They made themselves valuable as carpenters, blacksmiths, tailors, cobblers, and sugar plantation workers.

Since 1960, especially after the 1965 changes in the immigration law, thousands of Taiwanese Hakka has immigrated to the United States. The vast majority is students who came to the United States first to study and then to live permanently in America as they became professionals and technical people. They usually come from privileged families and are not desperate for new opportunities.

The new Hakka immigrants from Taiwan are generally more educated and likely to be in professional or managerial occupations than immigrants from other Asian countries or their fellow Hakka from China before World War II. Many of them are professionals, working for major corporations, hospitals and clinics, federal and state governments, colleges and universities, and so on. Many Hakka in the United States are investors or businessmen. They usually arrive in cities where they have close friends or relatives. They tend to change or adapt to form a new ethnic identity or alignment while preserving their Hakka heritage.

In general, present-day American Hakka are prosperous and abundant. Many are well-educated, have good professional jobs, and make lots of money, which enables them to enjoy the good life or a fairly decent life. This is a far cry from the early days when, in the course of two thousand years, they had insulated themselves from the surrounding population and clannishly preserved many of their old north China ways. Mostly, American Hakka have made a giant leap from those poverty-ridden days to the present life of affluence, enjoying their newly gained prosperity and abundance.

Today many Hakka live in such widely scattered areas as Australia, Borneo, Brazil, Brunei, Burma, Canada, Cuba, England, France, Guiana, Holland, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Japan, Malaysia, Mauritius, Mexico, Mongolia, New Zealand, Panama, Peru, the Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Taiwan, Thailand, Trinidad and Tobago, the United States, and Vietnam. Some Hakka have gained international prominence in business, various professions, and government. The total population of the Hakka worldwide is established conservatively at 52 million, of which 7 million live overseas. In other words, there are about 45 million Hakka in China,

representing 4 percent of the 1.33 billion population in China, according to the 1990 census. The Hakka represent one-third of ethnic Han people living in foreign lands.⁷⁴

These diasporas throughout Asia and other countries are significant to the study of Buddhist nuns in Taiwan, particularly Hakka nuns, because although the Hakka have migrated all over the world, they are still a close-knit Buddhist community. The Hakka from Taiwan return “home” to Taiwan on a frequent basis, particularly to Meinong because it is a village to which many Hakka trace their roots. In Meinong there are Buddhist temples and homes with courtyards that are considered for the Hakka family. Anyone who identifies herself or himself as Hakka is embraced as a family member. The Hakka have great respect for their elders, and embrace their family in Taiwan. All Hakka who visit Buddhist temples in Meinong donate money, which translates to more opportunities for the Hakka Buddhist nuns. In the next chapter we will discuss these opportunities further and explore the daily lives of the Hakka Buddhist nuns in Meinong Village.

CHAPTER 6

The Monastic Practices of Hakka Buddhist Nuns in Meinong Village

In Taiwan, Hakka people comprise about 15 percent of the population and are descended largely from Guandong. Many Hakka moved to lands high up in the hills or remote mountains to escape political persecution. Many of the Hakka continue to live in these hilly locations of Taiwan.

Taiwan's Hakka are concentrated in Meinong in Gaoxiong County, Xinzhu City and Xinzhu County, Miaoli County, Pindong County, and Zhongli in Daoyuan County, as well as smaller populations in Hualien and Taidong County. In recent decades, many Hakka have moved to the largest metropolitan areas of Taiwan, such as Taipei, Taizhong, and Gaoxiong.

Many people in Taiwan are of a mixed Hoklo, Hakka, and Formosan aboriginal heritage. Approximately half of the population of Hakka in Taiwan also speak Taiwanese, and it is highly likely that many Taiwanese-speaking households were descendants of Hakka families in Taiwan who lost their language a few generations back (probably due to some form of persecution).

The Hakka nuns in Meinong Village perform religious practices that blend Daoism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Chinese folk religion. Religious rituals in Meinong have a particular emphasis on gods and goddesses related to agriculture since many of the residents hold occupations dependent on climate conditions. The Hakka in Meinong, like Hakka in general across Taiwan, believe ancestral spirits can influence the lives of the living and therefore take special care, make offerings, and worship these spirits. They construct homes, graves, and ancestral halls that abide by the principles of

geomancy or *feng shui* to appease these spirits. In the Hakka Meinong community, the beliefs and practices closely resemble those of the Yue. However, anthropologists also note important differences. During the nineteenth century the Hakka did not worship as many of the higher-level state-sanctioned gods or Buddhist deities but instead placed more emphasis on Daoist beliefs and ancestor worship, and practiced spirit possession more in comparison to the Chinese in Guandong. Missionaries also characterized the Hakka as having more “monotheistic tendencies” than other Chinese, which they attribute to the fact that most likely relatively larger numbers of the Hakka converted to Christianity during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries than did other Han Chinese. Notwithstanding, in the case of the Hakka in Meinong village, I have never encountered a Hakka who considered herself or himself Christian; in fact, most would regard themselves as Buddhist, albeit their practices are in actuality an amalgamation of the various religions.

Polite Resistance to Christian Missionaries

Historically, Buddhist and Daoist priests, spirit mediums, feng shui experts, and various fortune tellers lived among the Hakka during the nineteenth century as among the Yue. During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Hakka Christian missionaries became particularly active in parts of Guandong and Xiang Gang. The Hakka in Meinong have a strong resistance to change, and even though Christian missionaries have visited their community, the Hakka Buddhists are polite but unresponsive. In fact, the Hakka Buddhists in Meinong place a great emphasis on tradition; on my past stays in Meinong over nearly 30 years, I have never noticed any

blatant changes to their religious practices, except for improvements to temples. I have also noticed the monastic community is dominated by nuns who consider themselves Buddhists, which mimics the prevalence of nuns in the overall population of Taiwan's Buddhist monastic community. The Buddhist Hakka nuns in Meinong exude a strikingly peaceful façade and seem to love their way of life.

The Daily Practices of Hakka Buddhist Nuns

Hakka Buddhist nuns participate in a number of ceremonies with the Hakka Meinong community, and many of the nuns are the organizers of these events. The Hakka have traditionally observed the most common Chinese life-cycle rituals and calendrical festivals, including the Lunar New Year, the Lantern Festival, Qing Ming, the Mid-Autumn Festival, the Dragon Boat Festival, Chong Yang, and Winter Solstice. The Hakka generally do not celebrate Yu Lan, the festival to appease “hungry ghosts,” which is heavily practiced among other Chinese.

The Hakka nuns in Meinong also incorporate the strong Hakka tradition of folk songs. In particular in Asia, the Hakka are known for their folk songs, especially the genre of mountain songs that were once commonly sung by women. They were sung when they worked in the fields or collected fuel along the hillsides. The women in Meinong still sing these folk songs because life is still centered on working in the fields. These songs, primarily on topics of love, actually incorporate various topics such as hard work, poverty, and personal hardships, which many Hakka endured. They not only reflect the experiences of the Hakka in the past, but also remind the younger generations

of the sacrifices and sufferings of the previous generations for the betterment of today's Hakka.

The Hakka traditional clothing is plain, but the women weave intricate patterned bands or ribbons, which they traditionally wore to secure black rectangular headcloths or the flat, circular, fringed Hakka hats. These are still worn by Hakka women in Meinong, particularly the older Hakka women.

In terms of medicine, the Hakka in Meinong combine the use of mainstream medical practices, which usually requires travel to Gaoxiong, and the consultation and employment of spirit healers, Chinese doctors, and traditional herbal remedies.

In general, the Hakka in Meinong also believe in ideas of hell and the influence of the “dead” spirits and their possible return to earth. A nineteenth-century Protestant missionary observed the Hakka were not very familiar with the Buddhist karmic concept of one's life influencing rebirth or the Buddhist idea of hell with its tortures and purgatory. Instead, he asserted the Hakka ascribed to the Daoist idea that “the righteous ascend to the stars and the wicked are destroyed.”¹ However, in the Hakka Buddhist monastic community, the nuns are educated at Buddhist centers in Taiwan and come back to educate the community members on Buddhist concepts. Therefore, Eitel's statement regarding the Hakka unfamiliarity with Buddhist concepts of rebirth does not apply to the Hakka Buddhist community in Meinong.

The Hakka nuns are primarily vegetarians, and the preparation of cuisine is an important part of their daily life. The Hakka have a distinct type cuisine and style of Chinese cooking that is little known outside the Hakka home. Hakka cuisine concentrates on the texture of food, the trademark of Hakka cookery. Although

preserved meats feature in Hakka delicacies, stewed, braised, and roasted meats and “texturized” contributions to the Hakka palate have a central place in their repertoire. In fact, the raw materials for Hakka food are no different from raw materials for any other type of regional Chinese cuisine; what they cook depends on what is available at the market. Hakka cuisine may be described as outwardly simple but tasty. The skill in Hakka cuisine lies in the ability to cook meat thoroughly without hardening it, and to naturally bring out the proteinaceous flavor (umami taste) of meat. An interesting fact is most of the Chinese restaurants in the United Kingdom are Hakka owned.

Hakka cuisine in Meinong is less dominated by expensive meats; instead, emphasis is placed on an abundance of vegetables. Pragmatic and simple, Hakka cuisine is garnished lightly with sparse or little flavoring. Modern Hakka cooking in Meinong favors offal, an example being deep-fried intestines. Offal is a premier food in China, and is more expensive than meat; fatty pork also is more expensive than lean pork. Other popular dishes include tofu with preservatives, along with their signature dish, salt-baked chicken. Another specialty is xiang cai. While it may be difficult to prove these were actually part of the diet of the old Hakka community, it is presently a commonly accepted view. The above dishes and their variations are found and consumed throughout China, including in Guandong, and are not particularly unique or confined to the Hakka Chinese population. Other dishes consumed by Hakka and many Chinese include chicken’s feet and duck’s feet.

Many Hakka nuns blend into mainstream society. Especially in Taiwan, their food, their holidays, and their daily lives are similar to the Chinese around them. However, the Hakka are different, particularly when it comes to their artistry and

language. One can often locate Hakka men and women gathered together to play and sing to the music of their ancestors at parks in Taiwan.

One way the Hakka nuns embrace their culture is by maintaining their Hakka language. The Hakka language is a form of Chinese closely related to Cantonese. There are three basic dialects of Hakka in Taiwan. All the young people speak Mandarin, but incredibly all younger nuns in Meinong have learned the Hakka language and possess complete fluency.

The Hakka Buddhist Community and the Preservation of Mahayana Buddhism

The Hakka Buddhist community in Meinong, as with the Buddhist community at large, includes monastics and laypeople. Both are necessary for the preservation of Buddhism, particularly in Taiwan where the monastic community is extremely wealthy due to the patronage of the laypeople. However, the Hakka Buddhist nuns choose a life of vowed simplicity, a life directly related to the preservation and dissemination of the Dharma to benefit others. They are the core of the lifestyle to which all Buddhist practitioners are committed. His Holiness the Dalai Lama states all Buddhist nuns have a unique role to play in the evolution of Buddhism, where the universal principle of the equality of all human beings takes precedence.

An important event that involved the Hakka Buddhist nuns in Taiwan occurred in February 1987, in Bodhgaya, India. For the first time in approximately 800 years, a bhiksuni Sangha in India performed the Bhiksuni Posadha, the nuns' bimonthly purification and restoration of vows. The Buddha established that the bhiksuni Sangha do this ceremony on the full moon and new moon days every month and required that a

minimum of five fully ordained nuns be present. It is amazing that the lineage of full ordination for women has been kept alive in Taiwan.

Another significant event occurred when the Hakka Buddhist nuns participated in the first Sakyadhita (“Daughters of Sakyamuni Buddha”) conference in Bodhgaya in February 1987. This conference brought together more than ten bhiksunis, most from Taiwan and the United States. These bhiksunis could perform the Bhiksuni Posadha. In 1998, another historic event for the bhiksuni Sangha occurred in Bodhgaya. Under the auspices of Fo Guang Shan Temple, the bhiksuni ordination was once again performed in India.

Perhaps just as fascinating as the estimated 75 percent female population of the Buddhist monastic members is the fact most nuns in Taiwan have a higher education background.² This higher education has translated into higher status in society for the nuns in Meinong and Taiwan as a whole. For example, Bhiksuni Zheng Yan is an artist and the founder of Hua Fan University.³ She is known as a highly accomplished individual; in general, however, Buddhist nuns are known collectively for their great works. Weiyi Zheng states many informants mentioned Buddhist nuns in Taiwan are well-trained in Buddhist doctrines, practices, and precepts. Some call them Luminary nuns to highlight their image of knowledge and discipline.⁴

Buddhism most likely came to Meinong with the migration of Chinese settlers. We do not know the exact date, but large scale migration began after 1661 when the Ming loyalists fled Manzu invasion in China. Buddhism in Meinong displayed both continuities and discontinuities because the Chinese wanted to hold on to their traditional values but at the same time were trying to adapt to their new environment. Life in

Taiwan was difficult for the Hakka, and the residents encountered dangers from plagues. At this time, there were temples in Taiwan that were funded by individuals, and some of the founders were not that knowledgeable regarding the religion.⁵ Therefore, the monastic form in early Taiwan was shaped differently from the Orthodox Chinese Buddhism on the mainland.

Early Buddhist statistics in Taiwan describe outside religious influences. A 1919 survey by the Japanese colonial government noted the heavy presence of zhaijiao, or “vegetarian sect,” in Taiwan. While there were only 77 Buddhist temples on the island, there were 172 meeting and residential places for the members of zhaijiao. Similarly, although there were only 156 Buddhist monks or nuns living at the monastic order, there were 8,663 members of zhaijiao.⁶

Zhaijiao was a popular religion that emerged around the early sixteenth century in mainland China. There were mainly three different branches of zhaijiao in Taiwan. While their doctrines and practices varied, their core belief was more or less the same. It centered on the Unborn Venerable Mother (Wuzheng Laomu), the creator-goddess. According to zhaijiao cosmology, all creatures in the universe are her children; in order to relieve her children from sufferings, she has sent numerous sages and buddhas to the earth.⁷ The texts and rituals of zhaijiao are a mix of Buddhist, Daoist, Confucian, and other folk religious elements. Although members of zhaijiao perceive themselves as Buddhists and their religion as a form of “lay Buddhism,”⁸ due to its mixture of other non-Buddhist elements, scholars debate over whether zhaijiao can be seen as Buddhism.

The Buddhist experience in Meinong changed greatly during Japanese colonial rule (1895–1945). The fact that Japanese Buddhism allows its clergy members to get

married and eat meat further blurred the distinction between Buddhist monks and zhaijiao members in the minds of Taiwanese Buddhists.⁹ The interaction between Japanese Buddhists and Taiwanese zhaijiao members were frequent and closed during the Japanese colonial period. On the one hand, the Japanese rulers sought eagerly to Japan-ize Taiwanese Buddhists,¹⁰ probably seeing Buddhism as a means to culturally colonize the Taiwanese population. On the other hand, Taiwanese Buddhists (including zhaijiao members) needed the protection of Japanese Buddhists in order to avoid political persecution.¹¹ For political and practical reasons, Taiwanese zhaijiao members actively, and even aggressively, involved themselves with Buddhist organizations and activities that had a closely cooperative relationship with the Japanese Buddhist missionaries.¹² In fact, many leading Taiwanese Buddhist monks during this period were first members of zhaijiao who then received formal Buddhist monastic ordination only after traveling later to China.¹³ In Meinong we certainly see this Japanese influence, particularly within the older generation because some members of the older generations were educated in Japan. The Hakka nuns overwhelmingly share a great appreciation for the Japanese, and if given the choice to identify themselves with the mainland Chinese or Japanese, the majority would prefer Japanese.

It is worthwhile to mention that the structure of zhaijiao allows women an escape from the rigid and severely patriarchal Chinese family system. Marjorie Topley reports that women in the rural Guandong province of southern China during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century could choose a life without marriage by taking up zhaijiao vows and entering a zhaijiao residential place after retirement.¹⁴

The same phenomena occurred in Meinong and Taiwan at large. The 1919 survey by the Japanese colonial government noted the presence of a large number of female *zhaijiao* members.¹⁵ These members tended to observe a certain number of precepts, vegetarian diets, and celibacy.¹⁶ The existence of a large number of female *zhaijiao* members might be explained by the fact that during the early periods Taiwan did not have enough qualified monks and nuns to give formal Buddhist ordination. Also, the laws of the Qing dynasty forbade women under the age of forty to be ordained as Buddhist nuns.¹⁷

Hakka Buddhist Nuns as Active Actors

The presence of a large number of female *zhaijiao* members indicates that it is wrong to perceive women as passive actors. Women often have grabbed the opportunity to seek life outside the traditional and patriarchal social arrangements. For example, the economic structure in rural Guangdong in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century provided women the ability to make a living outside the family, and many women, indeed, sought the opportunity to choose a living arrangement independent of family or male supervision.¹⁸ This similar economic structure was brought into rural Meinong.

This is a point that scholars often ignore. When some male scholars¹⁹ attempt to find out the reasons for the rapid decline of *zhaijiao* after the Retrocession, they look only at the external factors, such as political interference, and ignore the possibility that female *zhaijiao* members could be active agents who consciously changed their religious practice. In addition, the large number of female *zhaijiao* members at the early periods

and the overwhelming number of Buddhist nuns at the present time might be seen as a continuum in the religious life of Buddhists in Taiwan. The consistently large number of female renunciants might mean that the religious patriarchs in Taiwan cannot totally disregard the presence of women. So, it also might mean that Buddhist women in Taiwan probably face fewer obstacles in the struggle against gender discrimination than their Buddhist sisters in other countries. For example, whether it was the Buddhist missionaries from Japan²⁰ or monks from China,²¹ they had to acknowledge the presence of the large number of female renunciants and ran special classes for women. In either case, education certainly advanced Buddhist women.

After the end of World War II, Taiwan was given the Chinese Nationalist regime. When the Communists took over China and the Chinese Nationalist government was forced to retire to Taiwan, many Buddhist monks and nuns also escaped to Taiwan. For the second time, Buddhism in Taiwan faced rapid change. The initial rule of the Chinese Nationalist regime was a harsh and dictatorial one. Taiwanese Buddhists were forced to subordinate themselves to BAROC (the Buddhist Association of Republic of China), which had close ties with the government and was given the authority to supervise all Buddhist activities in Taiwan.²² The association, along with other monks and nuns who recently fled China, quickly engaged in the rebuilding of Orthodox Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan. For example, during the Japanese colonial period, many Taiwanese Buddhists sought Buddhist education in Japan and adopted Japanese Buddhist customs, such as allowing the clergy members to eat meat and marry. The Chinese monks saw these behaviors as degradation and sought solutions to change the situation.²³ To build Orthodox Chinese Buddhism in Taiwan, Buddhist monastic ordination was certainly

crucial. The coming of the large number of qualified monks and nuns from mainland China enabled the ordination to be possible. In 1953, the first postwar Buddhist higher ordination was carried out on the island.²⁴ Among those who received the higher ordination were many female members of *zhaijiao*.²⁵ *Zhaijiao* has declined rapidly in the twentieth century. The majority of *zhaijiao* members have become either Buddhists in the sense of Orthodox Chinese Buddhism or Daoists/Yiguandao.²⁶ Many of the female members were Hakka and participated in the ordination.

The economic growth that began in the 1970s and the lifting of martial law in 1987 once again shaped Buddhism in Taiwan.²⁷ The prosperous economy means increasing wealth, which is seen by David Jordan as an important factor that changed the religious life of people in Meinong. This fact means more donations to the monastic temples and enables Buddhist monks and nuns in Meinong to engage in activities that were not possible before. The increased wealth also contributes to the rising standard of the Buddhist monastic order (in the level of education of members as well as the level of their religious motivation). Because Chinese monasticism is closely related to the rigid Chinese family system, monastic orders tend to recruit individuals without family ties.²⁸ Hence, we often find records of monastic members who joined the order not with the intention for spiritual practice but to escape poverty.²⁹ It is due to the constantly changing social and economic conditions that the nuns' order was founded and allowed women to pursue a religious life that meshed with their ideals.

The image of nuns in Taiwan today might appear to be elitist because it is now competitive to be admitted in certain institutes like the Luminary Institute,³⁰ which provides advanced Buddhist education for nuns. Located in a rural village in Southern

Taiwan, however, the temple of the nuns' order actually began as a grass-roots, folk religious temple. The temple was not initially built for the monastic order but for the religious needs of the villagers.

In the mid-nineteenth century, a Guan Yin statue worshiped at a villager's home was rumored to be performing miracles. The fame spread and other villagers expressed the wish to worship Guan Yin. So, a temple was built for Guan Yin worship. However, earthquakes later destroyed the original temple. From 1943 to the construction of a concrete building in 1972, the Guan Yin statue was taken into villagers' homes by turns. In 1973, the temple, then named Yu Shan Yan Jin Lan Si, was formally registered with the government for the first time. According to the official website of nuns' orders, the villagers thought the only way for the temple to last was to have an ordained abbot or abbess. So, a request was sent to BAROC. Bhikshu Bai Sheng, President of BAROC, recommended Bhiksuni Xin Zhi to be the abbess of Yu Shan Yan. It seems that the adherents of Yu Shan Yan were not aware of the difference between folk religion and Buddhism. But Bhiksuni Xin Zhi was educated in the Orthodox Chinese Buddhism and intended to create a more constructive role for this temple. She first changed the name of the temple to Luminary, a term abstracted from Lankavatara Sutra. She also began to purchase the temple land from the villagers for the monastic order, indicating she was determined to establish a long-lasting monastic order at the temple.

In 1979, Bhiksuni Wu Yin succeeded Bhiksuni Xin Zhi and became the abbess of Luminary Temple. Bhiksuni Wu Yin had a university education, which was rare at that time, and had just returned from a short period of study in Hawaii. Given her unusual educational background, many advised her not to take up the post at the remote village,

which, seemingly, had no potential. However, Bhiksuni Wu Yin had studied at the same Buddhist institute with Bhiksuni Xin Zhi and thus shared similar ideals. She was determined to carry out Bhiksuni Xin Zhi's renovation works at the temple.

Although today the term *nuns* has become equivalent to well-educated and well-trained Buddhist nuns, the transformation of Luminary Temple from a grass-roots, local/popular religion temple to an Orthodox Chinese Buddhist nunnery has not been completed. When one enters Luminary Temple, he or she might be surprised by its colorful ceilings and the heavy incense burning in Buddha Hall, features associated more with a local/popular religion temple than a Buddhist temple. Although Bhiksuni Xinzhi was conscious enough to start the process of purchasing the temple land for the monastic order, to some villagers, Luminary Temple still belongs to them. Potential conflict³¹ in the transformation erupted in 1996 when a group of villagers attempted to expel the nuns and take over the temple.³² The conflict has not been fully settled to this day. Out of respect for the villagers' religious beliefs, nuns tolerate much of the non-Buddhist rituals performed at the temple.³³ For example, once a month, some villagers gather at the temple to cook and eat pork. These behaviors, although tolerated, are viewed unsuitable for a Chinese Buddhist setting to many nuns.

Hakka Buddhist Nuns as a Feminist Movement

Before I begin, I must point out that nowhere in the publications of nuns' orders did I find the term *feminist*, nor do nuns label themselves as feminist. In fact, nuns may not even like to be associated with the term *feminist* and they may not want to publicize their Hakka identity either. However, the Buddhist movement that has pushed for the

continuation of the nuns' order has contributed to and benefitted from the feminist and Hakka movements and has impacted government decisions in Taiwan as a whole.

In my observation, most Buddhist nuns in Taiwan do not like to be labeled as feminist for political and religious reasons. Politically, feminism indicates challenging the existing patriarchal tradition and Buddhist nuns strive for peace and understanding. For example, Barbara Reed argues the tension for Hakka women who struggle between the old religious/philosophical traditions and the new aspirations of women of contemporary times is complicated by not only the influence of western values, but also the propaganda of an idealized culture from mainland China.³⁴ The label of feminist was especially dangerous during the early years when the authoritarian regime restricted social movements, including women's movements, and allowed little room to promote the notion of gender equality.³⁵

Religiously, Buddhism in Meinong regards the difference in sexes as illusion³⁶; therefore, carrying the label feminist might draw one into attachment to the male/female duality that Buddhists try to transcend. The dilemma is also faced by many western Buddhist women who find balancing feminist anger and the Buddhist goal of transcending dualism a delicate task.³⁷ However, more importantly, it is notable that I am seeing the phenomenon of nuns in Taiwan as an outsider, from an academic perspective. Naturally, my concerns may be different from those of the nuns themselves, who are insiders to the phenomenon and the spiritual practice. While my concern might be to find women's voices in the phenomenon, theirs might be to transcend male/female duality.

Katherine Young argues "the basic aim of feminism is to identify the problems of women as a class and to promote their interests as a class."³⁸ It is on the basis of this

definition that I see nuns as feminists. But because they do not adopt the feminist label, I call the phenomenon a quiet feminist movement. In the following sections, I will examine the nuns' order from three aspects in order to show why I think the phenomenon of nuns in Meinong, and Taiwan at large, is feminist.

Religious Symbols

The first aspect I am going to examine is the symbols used by nuns in Taiwan. Feminist transformation of religious symbols questions whether the religious symbols, including the application of these symbols, such as through worship, reflect the experiences of both genders.³⁹ In terms of symbols, the nuns' order is a passive agent rather than an active one.

It is a passive agent because, even though Guan Yin, the main deity at the Luminary Temple, is a female, the nuns did not choose to have Guan Yin as their main deity. In fact, the nuns were hired to manage the Guan Yin worship at the village. At the shrine room, besides the main Guan Yin statue, there are also other small Guan Yin statues that the villagers entrusted the nuns to look after. These Guan Yin statues are fondly called by the villagers "Big Mama," "Second Mama," "Third Mama," and so on. At special occasions, such as weddings or funerals, villagers invite a Guan Yin mama to their home in order to receive her blessings. To respect the villagers' religion, nuns tolerate the villagers' hiring theater troupes to perform at the temple during festivals or even offering meat at the ghost festival.⁴⁰ Thus, Luminary Temple has an interesting feature of being a combination of an Orthodox Chinese Buddhist nunnery and a local/popular religious temple.

Some might claim that goddesses are not always feminist, for goddesses do not necessarily provide legal, political, or economic autonomy for women. However, the fact that goddesses can provide “a great deal of psychological and spiritual comfort”⁴¹ should not be overlooked. The transformation of Guan Yin from a male deity to a female deity in the Chinese tradition might be viewed as the manifestation of a need for female imagery. As in ancient times, Guan Yin can still be a symbol of liberation and coping for contemporary Taiwanese women living in a new, but still male-dominated, family system.⁴² Although nuns did not choose Guan Yin worship, they did not totally ignore the coincidence of having Guan Yin worshipped at their temple. Their quarterly magazine, *Xiang Guang Zhuang Yan*, has run several special issues on Guan Yin, in which academic articles on Guan Yin are published.⁴³ In the issue immediately after the devastating earthquake in 1999, the editorial of *Xiang Guang Zhuang Yan* appeals to Guan Yin for the strength to overcome sufferings:

We do not know when the sufferings on the earth will finally end. But the various appearances of Guan Yin have inspired us: in different time and space, facing different beings, you can also become the multi-appearances Guan Yin and help to relieve the cries of sufferings; using wisdom and compassion, guiding beings cross the ocean of sufferings.⁴⁴

Also by accident, nuns are involved with another symbol that might be seen as a sign for feminist liberation: their monastic robe. In Chinese Buddhism, both monks and nuns shave their head and wear the same type of robes.⁴⁵ It can sometimes be difficult to distinguish a monk from a nun. Bhiksuni Wu Yin teaches that the monastic robe symbolizes the motivation and the ultimate goal of a renunciant. Additionally, because all the monastic members wear the same type of robe regardless of social status before the renunciation, the monastic robe is an expression of equality.⁴⁶ Because monks and

nuns have to wear the same robe, the monastic robe liberates the nuns from socially constructed concepts of femininity as well as the social pressure for women to be slim and beautiful.⁴⁷ Bhiksuni Wu Yin further changed the robe worn by nuns. Because the traditional robe worn by Chinese Buddhist nuns might be too narrow and might show the curves of a nun, she widened the robe so it would not show any curves. This was not because of any shame regarding the biological nature of a woman, but to lead a nun further away from the socially constructed habit of focusing too much on the body (for example, the social pressure for women to be slim) and to focus more on a spiritual practice.⁴⁸ In other words, nuns may have been a passive agent in choosing their monastic robe (Bhiksuni Wu Yin may have changed the robe a little bit, but it is still based on the traditional Chinese robe), but for them, the monastic robe symbolizes not only their monastic identity, but also the transcendence of gender appearances between male and female. This androgynizing practice has helped decrease discrimination against female nuns in Taiwan.

Structure of the Nuns' Order

The nuns are active agents in structuring the nuns' order in Meinong. Because of the absence in *Ultimate Divine in Buddhism*,⁴⁹ the more urgent aspect for the feminist transformation of Buddhism perhaps lies in the area of organizational structure. Rita Gross even argues that "the most crucial feminist issue for Buddhism is recognizing and empowering female gurus and lineage holders."⁵⁰ In this aspect, nuns are an active agent rather than a passive agent.

To examine the structure of the nuns' order that impacts the lives of Hakka nuns today, it is essential to learn about another nun from an earlier time, Bhiksuni Tian Yi (1924–1980). Bhiksuni Xin Zhi is a direct disciple of Bhiksuni Tian Yi, and Bhiksuni Wu Yin had studied under Bhiksuni Tian Yi for several years. Bhiksuni Tian Yi was born into a wealthy merchant family and had the chance to study at the university in Japan during a time when secondary education was rare for Taiwanese girls. After graduating from the university, she returned home to manage the family business and eventually inherited the shop.⁵¹ Thus, we can at least be sure that she did not enter the monastic order out of poverty, as was often the case in Chinese Buddhist and Daoist priesthoods during the early twentieth century.⁵² As a child, Bhiksuni Tian Yi lived in a zhai jiao nunnery for a short period of time and for a while considered joining the zhai jiao order. She later chose to join the Orthodox Chinese Buddhist order, however, out of a desire for a more strict spiritual practice.⁵³ From this fact, we can see that Bhiksuni Tian Yi was an active agent in pursuing her own religious life.

Bhiksuni Tian Yi received Buddhist monastic ordination in 1953; from then until her death she worked diligently for the reconstruction of the nuns' order. However, she did not place the responsibility on the monks. Rather, it was crucial for her that nuns should take up the responsibility of guiding their own lives. She urged Buddhist nuns to be independent and self-reliant, to learn to do every task by themselves, and to have the ability to solve their own problems. Throughout her lifetime, she advocated the ideas that “women must be taught by women” and “bhiksuni stand up.”⁵⁴ I do not know whether she was aware of the feminist wave that was going on in the West during the latter part of

her life,⁵⁵ but Bhiksuni Tian Yi no doubt contributed a great deal to the feminist transformation of the monastic order.

Influenced by Bhiksuni Tian Yi's feminist ideas, nuns did not hesitate to take advantage of the favorable social trends to advance themselves. The traditional suppression of organized religious groups by the imperial courts of China had limited the social functions that could be performed by organized religious groups.⁵⁶ However, beginning in the 1980s, social, economic, and political changes in Taiwan enabled Buddhism to enjoy great expansion. For example, the lifting of martial law in 1987 and the prosperous economy made possible social space and financial strength for Buddhist organizations to engage in various social functions.⁵⁷ Nuns in Meinong used this opportunity well. By the time of the writing of this text, nuns have established five branch centers throughout Taiwan to, on the one hand, achieve their goal of spreading Dharma and, on the other hand, to attract more devotees outside the immediate area of the Luminary Temple and thus more financial support from the laity.⁵⁸

Among the social functions that nuns hold is a women's retreat. An article in their quarterly magazine reveals their intention to establish women's retreats. Monastics take refuge in Buddha and follow the spiritual path of Dharma. Monastics renounce the world to follow the Buddha's path, but do not dissociate from society nor loathe society. The Hakka nuns in Meinong advocate the Dharma should be preached to everyone and not just women. But after several Dharma retreats for the general public, they found it difficult. To achieve Buddhist educational and cultural goals, it is necessary to penetrate different stages and individualities. In other words, people of different statuses and classes have different needs. The nuns' goal is to establish women's righteous faith in

Dharma. They hope that by involving themselves with various activities in the retreat, women can discover the wholeness of Dharma in their daily life and eventually enable themselves to achieve further growth.⁵⁹ This objective shows that nuns value Dharma preaching and social works highly. More significantly, they recognize the importance of the different needs in women and men. Many western Buddhist women have argued for the need to have women Buddhist teachers for women.⁶⁰ The fact that nuns recognize the special needs of women and run special retreats for women might be viewed as a step towards feminist transformation of Buddhist structure.

Another significant feminist transformation by the nuns' order is the founding of its own publishing house. Ursula King points out that "the greatest problem lies in the fundamentally patriarchal and androcentric framework of the theological and religious writings of the past where women have been written about and defined by others, without having a voice themselves."⁶¹ Indeed, scholars in the West often understand Buddhism through texts that were written by monks and where women and the laity remain hidden.⁶² The existence of the publishing house enabled nuns to record their stories and to have a voice of their own. In addition to the quarterly magazine, *Xiang Guang Zhuang Yan*, which regularly features articles written by the nuns, there is also an internal newsletter and Internet discussion board that allow the nuns to exchange their experiences among themselves. Besides the magazine and newsletter, the publishing house of the nuns' order also publishes books on Dharma, including books that are translated from other languages and traditions.⁶³ The nuns have noticed the lack of records on Buddhist nuns in history; they thus have begun a project of searching and writing down the stories of Buddhist nuns in Taiwan in order to preserve a more adequate

history.⁶⁴ The fact that I can learn a great deal about nuns simply by visiting their website proves they are not a silent group.⁶⁵ The voices of nuns should and can be heard.

New Opportunities for Education

I also want to highlight that the nuns' order is renowned for its Buddhist education.⁶⁶ Buddhist monastic education was a major concern for Bhiksuni Wu Yin when she assumed the position of abbess of Luminary Temple. It is said that when she was working in the field one day, she raised her head and saw a group of Catholic nuns relaxing at the balcony of a nearby church school. She was stunned and pondered why, as religious professionals, Buddhist nuns had to do manual labor while Catholic nuns could engage in educational works. That year, she was thirty and had been ordained for twelve years. She returned to books and eventually got herself through senior high school and university.⁶⁷

The incident with the Catholic nuns was not the only factor that motivated Bhiksuni Wu Yin to seek improvement of Buddhist nuns' monastic education. She never forgot the idea "bhiksuni stand up," advocated by Bhiksuni Tian Yi.⁶⁸ For the nuns' order to be independent and self-reliant, education is certainly a key. Furthermore, Bhiksuni Wu Yin joined the order at a time when the status of Buddhist nuns was very low in Taiwan. She realized that in order to improve the status of Buddhist nuns in society, monastic education was essential.⁶⁹

She argues that being a monastic is like being a professional, and just like a professional needs professional training, a monastic also needs special monastic training. Although the goal for a bhiksuni is the ultimate liberation, living in the world means that

a bhiksuni still has to deal with other people, including both monastics and the laity. Hence, to learn how to interact with other people properly is crucial. For her, not only should monastic education teach Dharma, but the education itself should be a process that helps a nun to absorb both her body and mind in the spiritual practice. Only by providing solid support from both inside and outside the monastic order will Dharma last long in the world.⁷⁰ Therefore, Bhiksuni Wu Yin is an active agent who works diligently to reconstruct the monastic education for Buddhist nuns. Her idea for the monastic education contains both religious elements (for example, the need to learn the righteous Dharma) and practical elements (for example, the unavoidable need to interact with other people). The Hakka nuns embrace and exhibit these elements today.

In 1980, Luminary Buddhist Institute for nuns was finally founded, which benefited nuns in Meinong. A Buddhist nun does not have to be a member of a nuns' order to enter the Institute; however, to change the ignorant and uneducated image of Buddhist nuns, the Institute sets high admission standards. The institute requires a nun to have at least a senior high school education to enroll, in order to ensure all the students have a similar capability to absorb the trainings together. The founding of the Institute was coincident with a time when higher education was becoming more and more common for both men and women in Taiwan. The high admission standard set by the Institute ensures the training is given to nuns who are sincerely motivated to pursue higher Dharma education.⁷¹ Research shows most Buddhist nuns in contemporary Taiwan join the order mainly for religious reason. This is an important factor, for if a nun joins the monastic order mainly for religious reasons,⁷² then she is more likely than those who join the order for other reasons to be an active agent in the construction of her

religious life. Once again, the nuns' order catches this social trend well. The slogan of the Luminary order, "Be attentive to Buddhist education and to create Pure Land in the human realm together," creates an active and progressive image. Such an image is very appealing to young female intellectuals who sincerely want to dedicate their lives to Buddhism.⁷³

Bhiksuni Wu Yin wants the training at Luminary Institute to be a bridge for students to go from the lay lifestyle to the monastic lifestyle. Thus, the curricula at the Institute are divided into five categories: intellectual studies, practice, community life training, monastery administration, and Dharma education,⁷⁴ covering both religious study and practical training. This way, young Hakka women can transition directly into the monastic lifestyle after high school. The Institute wants to avoid the situation of becoming too other-worldly and disconnected from society. Thus, although Dharma education is the main focus at the Institute, other modern sciences, such as psychology, sociology, and information technology, are also provided.⁷⁵ By the time I did my fieldwork in 2001, Luminary Institute had gained the reputation of being a well-respected Buddhist college.

When teaching precepts to the nuns, Bhiksuni Wu Yin stresses the importance of the full understanding of the precepts rather than just observing precepts blindly.⁷⁶ The emphasis on the full understanding of the circumstance is also stressed in the teachings to the laywomen:

Therefore, only through the self-examination and self-awareness, which arise from the reflection on Dharma, we may gain full understanding of our circumstance, and consequently develop the virtues of optimism, determination and benevolence. We believe that it is the true beginning of an new and fresh life.⁷⁷

A short story in *Xiang Guang Zhuang Yan* ends with a comment from a monastic⁷⁸:

To struggle for equality is to be one's own master. But during the struggle for independence, one should not forget the respect for the other. Only with mutual respect can there be true equality! If we treat each other with the intention for revenge, there will only be endless cycle of sufferings! The foundation of the so-called gender equality is built on mutual respect.⁷⁹

Therefore, it seems nuns have followed the teachings of Bhiksuni Tian Yi, who placed the responsibility of nuns' welfare on the nuns themselves, rather than on the monks. Nuns also teach laywomen to be self-reliant and take control of their own situation. They encourage laywomen not to perceive themselves as victims and to maintain harmony and respect toward wrongdoers. On the surface, such teachings appear to be a nonconfrontation with the patriarchy and oppression, and it does not seem feminist. However, the teachings of nuns might be seen as a strategic approach, which emphasizes the importance of developing strategies in the resistance against oppression. Being strategists does not mean passive acceptance of the oppressed conditions.⁸⁰ In the nuns' teachings, empowerment for women does not come from confrontations with patriarchy, but from within. The emphasis on a woman's responsibility for her own situation leads to the emphasis on the need to develop survival skills and a righteous mind; consequently, the woman is given the internal strength to tackle whatever oppression she might find herself facing.

Social and Economic Conditions

The success of nuns in Meinong is mainly attributed to the social and economic conditions in Gaoxiong. For example, had Taiwan had a long history of a monastic

order, there might be more obstacles for Buddhist nuns to reconstruct their religious life because more privileged monastics would already exist. But because monastic tradition is relatively new in Taiwan, Buddhist nuns might have more space to shape their religious life. Other factors, such as the increasing mobility of people in Taiwan, which gives a monastic order the opportunity to attract devotees and donations outside their immediate temple area,⁸¹ also contribute to the success of the nuns' order.

However, without active agents outside of Buddhist monasticism, nuns would not have gained such tremendous success. Nuns have been active agents in using the favorable social and economic conditions to advance themselves. Nuns certainly had two choices: They could be passive and follow whatever orders the monastic patriarchs told them to do, or they could be active and try to improve themselves. Nuns have chosen the latter option and moved towards the goals of independence and self-reliance.⁸² Because both insiders and outsiders have been active agents in the construction of their religious life, I see the phenomenon of nuns as being a feminist movement.

CONCLUSION

Realities and Innovators of the Mahayana Tradition

The Hakka Buddhist nuns play many roles as innovators and preservers of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition and bearers and transmitters of traditional Hakka culture. As a result of their many contributions, they are transforming their society. Hakka women do not outright advocate a feminist agenda nor are their actions primarily motivated by their desire to become equal or superior to men. Instead, they act to transform their society for the betterment of all beings.

However, it would be unreasonable to believe the Hakka Buddhist nuns were not impacted by the feminist movement in Taiwan that emerged in the early 1970s. The strength of the feminist movement in Taiwan for the past few decades has brought so many benefits to women that even if the Hakka Buddhist nuns did not directly participate in these movements, they are certainly recipients of the feminists' successful operations. Clearly, Hakka identity is an important channel that connects feminism, political and social engagement, and Buddhism.

Taiwan's Feminist Movement and Western Feminism

Taiwan's feminist agenda was inspired by western feminism and the experience is complex and the results dynamic. Taiwan's feminist movement owes its ideological origin to western feminism. Especially in recent decades, many women in Taiwan have received their college undergraduate and/ or graduate education in the West. In fact, many women from Taiwan attend or are alumni of the most elite universities. Parents are now very proud when they can send their daughters abroad to gain new experiences.

Women's personal growth has been closely tied to feminist movements and feminist studies since the early 1970s. Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood Is Powerful* provoked educated women in Taiwan to think about women's status. Margery Wolf's *Women and the Family in Rural Taiwan* was another book that taught women to rethink what they thought was the familiar. For example, in the mid-1970s, Yenlin Ku returned to Taiwan, taught at National Jiao Tong University, and volunteered to work for the Pioneer Press, a short-lived feminist press, which advocated social reform and organized big events. Ku met a Chinese literature lecturer on her way to Pioneer Press and they shared similar views and became life-time friends.¹

According to Ku, Li's determination led to the founding the first feminist magazine, press, and organization, *Awakening*, in 1982. It was established by a small group of women. During this time, mainstream culture viewed feminist ideas as too extreme. As a result, *Awakening* became a center for encouragement and mutual support.

The members of *Awakening* felt the urgency to learn more about feminism from around the world and to keep written records. In 1985, Ku participated in the Asian Women's Conference in Davao, the Philippines and in the NGO World Women's Conference in Nairobi, Kenya. She was introduced to women's organizations in New York City. These new world experiences inspired her to help raise awareness regarding women's struggles. Encouraged by the academic field of women's studies informed by the newly created academic field of women's studies, she and others created the Women's Research Program (WRP). This program was the first inter-collegiate women's studies center in Taiwan.

Martial law was lifted in 1987 and many women's organizations and associations sprouted and their influence grew quickly. Awakening was able to officially register and this formal registration allowed its members to fundraise. In this same year, *China Forum* was invited to present her paper, "Female Intellectuals and the Development of Taiwan Society" at a conference. Interestingly, the editorial board that invited her was all-male and they viewed her paper on the feminist movement celebrates International Women's Day. Unfortunately, most of the conference attendees were women and they were less than encouraging. Many female university instructors, in fact, argued with her that there is no such thing as a feminist movement and such a movement is not necessary and would not make a difference in Taiwan. They attacked Awakening for being too radical and suggested a "correct" approach. They advised Ku to establish an organization like the New Environment Housewives League, which does not attack gender discrimination but cleans the environment. Ku and her colleagues were admonished by other women for not holding up their reputations as scholars and that her presentation on the feminist movement makes them lose respect for her group. She was so discouraged by this experience that she resigned from the Women's Research Group shortly following the conference. However, Ku, Li Yuanzhen, and other feminists continued to press for change and provided support for each other.

Sacrifice and Strategy

The core members sustained Awakening and in the 1990s the feminist movement quickly gained momentum. The group successfully helped legalize abortion; drafted the Equal Employment Bill and Revision of the Family Law; institutionalized protection for

teenage prostitutes; pressured the government to revise its gender-biased primary school textbooks; and changed government hiring policy for banks and credit unions, training policy for insurance workers, and retirement policy for female employees in socio-educational institutes. Awakening took part in these activities to ensure the safety of women everywhere. The group strategized and decided to take a more subtle approach. They knew what they wanted to accomplish but they were aware of the remnants of Confucian influence. Women's groups worked together and observed legal proceedings. To get the media on their side, the women's groups argued that Taiwan needs to legalize abortion to best serve society by controlling population growth, increase social harmony, and help girls who were raped. In reality, most women fighting for the legalization of abortion simply wanted a choice and control of their own bodies. In fact, most abortions were performed on married women due to contraceptive failures.

Their main goal was to get what they want but the strategy was to satisfy the ruling apparatus' desire for supremacy because legislators thought they would lose face if they caved into feminists' demands. Further, the public was more willing to support a less extreme approach that focused on helping victims of sexual violence rather than helping women abort simply out of their desire to do so. By appearing to submit to mainstream ideology, Awakening and other women's groups quickly and cohesively increased women's rights.

Although women had access to safer abortions as a result of passing this bill, they lost the opportunity to inspire others to clearly vocalize demands for equality and quick progress. Further, appearing to submit to mainstream ideology is still submitting to the dominant ideology because women were again placed in a compromising position. The

bill did not come without restrictions. Women were not awarded absolute control of their bodies. For a woman to receive a legal abortion, they needed parental or spousal consent. As a result, the less radical approach leads women to settle for less.

To garner support from various groups, Awakening activities focused on topics on “year of the housewife” to “women and politics.” It was not until the early 1990s until topics on sexuality and women’s choice were openly discussed. Awakening was socially engaged and worked with other groups to improve society and many lives. Human trafficking was a serious concern since the 1980s and Rainbow, a rehabilitation program for teenage prostitutes worked with Awakening to coordinate a strong union of 31 women’s rights, native people’s rights, and religious groups to march and campaign against human trafficking. By arguing for the protection of human rights, both the media and the general public sided with these groups. These groups then established Taiwan Women’s Rescue Association and the government began to closely monitor these activities.

On a somewhat lighter note, gender roles were reversed when a Mr. Taibei Beauty Pageant took place. The event was organized to spoof the Miss World Beauty Pageant and the discrimination women endure became convincingly evident. In many ways, this performance was a modern staged take of *Flowers in the Mirror*. Since the 1989 national election, Awakening and other women’s groups have promoted women’s interests by organizing women’s platforms, campaign rallies, invited influential western scholars from elite universities, such as Ethel Klein from Columbia University, to speak about women’s leadership training and election strategies, and host events for candidates to debate on women’s issues. In fact, prior to the 1992 election, Awakening and other

women's groups invited the candidates to share their views and to address their pledge to advocate women's rights. They also gave a public performance evaluation of sitting legislatures. A triumphant anti-sexual harassment demonstration in Taipei was organized in 1994 and over a thousand people participated in the event. Women in Taiwan for the first time rallied openly for a gender issue and did not have to use another issue to garner public sympathy. Since the mid 1990s, Awakening and other women's groups' activities are similar to those of western radical feminists.

The members of Awakening have helped establish new women's groups for specific societal groups. They contributed to the organization of Taipei Women's Development Center for the rehabilitation of women surviving a family trauma in 1983; the first Women's Studies conference and the first Women's Research Program in 1985; the Rainbow Project in 1986; the New Environment Housewives' League, the Warm Life Association, and the Taipei Women's Rescue Association in 1987; Angles Askew, in 1989; Between Us, the first lesbian group, in 1990; women's studies on campuses in the early 1990s; and the Feminist Studies Association in 1994. The Feminist Studies Association was composed primarily of women in university academia and cultural workers. The increase in the number and influence of these groups produced an excitement and cohesion among women. Some women did not want to be directly affiliated with a feminist group and these new groups with a specific purpose allowed them to share a common goal without appearing as a radical feminist.

Awakening also provides support for more local women's groups. By 1993, Awakening's membership grew internationally and their newsletter was edited by foreign members and published in English. In 1994, Fembooks, the first women's bookstore and

coffee shop was opened in Taipei with the team work of more than thirty Awakening members and friends.

At first when the groups were newly formed, the resources were limited because its members were often the same. However, each group now has their own special characteristics and the memberships no longer greatly overlap. Each group tackles their specific issues while Awakening is the overarching group that provides support and engages in a spectrum of various themes.

Economic Growth and Political Liberalization

Taiwan's Buddhist and feminist movements gained momentum so quickly for a number of unique reasons. First, I want to highlight that Taiwan is a small island. It is only about 14,000 square miles, approximately the size of Maryland and Delaware combined. Its geographic feature also allows Taiwan to be isolated in terms of not having any other lands attached. On an even smaller scale, most economic, political, and cultural activities are concentrated in Taipei, the capital. With only 793 square miles, it is easy for movement organizers to locate key government officials, the legislature, and the media. Interaction between various groups is easy to coordinate since not too much travel is usually involved. The small geographic area facilitates frequent interactions and speedy results.

Second, the accelerated results produced by these movements were possible because of the rapid economic growth in the 1970s–1980s and quick political liberalization since the 1980s. Buddhist, feminist, and other movement organizers took advantage of the economic and political opportunities during this period to advocate for

women. However, we still see evidence of patriarchal practice from Confucianism and Japanese colonial rule.

In addition to its geographic isolation, the UN and its agencies do not scrutinize the status of women in Taiwan. Women who are citizens of UN member nations usually enjoy legal protection and institutional support. However, Awakening and other women's groups inspire women to collectively stand up for their rights and to fight for equality. As more women and men from Taiwan are educated in the west and return to share their views, more people will want equal rights and opportunities and the one radical will become acceptable and the only thing permanent will be change.²

Similarly, Gargan's article in the *Taipei Journal* illustrates a shared view that progress has definitely been made on behalf of and by women, but much still remains to be done. Gargan's intriguing piece includes a detailed description of Annette Lu. Lu is described as having the classy, professional appearance of a corporate executive, but she is a convicted criminal and "political rabble-rouser." She was born in 1944 and her parents wanted her to be a boy. She was determined to compete with her brothers. However, her father provided education for her.

She attended the University of Illinois and returned to Taiwan in 1971. As an undergraduate student at University of Illinois, she absorbed feminism and came back and fought against gender discrimination against women in Taiwan's college admissions. At that time, Taiwan was considering to give preference to men in college admissions. She spent the next six years speaking and urging women to fight for equality.

The government viewed her as a suspicious individual stirring up trouble and went undercover to check up on her. A secret agent posed as her coffee shop's manager.

She was in charge of a publishing company and one of her editors was an informer. At her meetings, police agents would creep in. Lu viewed the nationalist Guomintang as highly suspect of anyone who opposed them.

She attended Harvard University where she received a master of law degree, returned to Taiwan, and entered politics. She was extremely upset that the UN no longer recognized Taiwan and spoke against the one-China policy, which led her to arrest and imprisonment for sedition. She complained that she was sent to jail for over five years for a short 20-minute passionate address.

By the time she returned from Harvard, Taiwan from her perspective was corrupted by Guomintang's money. She wanted to run for public office but could not due to her conviction. She had to wait until 1992. During this period before she could officially run for office, she spoke and wrote against buying votes, propagated equality for women, and advocated the readmission of Taiwan into the UN. She traveled throughout Taiwan to reach out to people.

In 1993 she was elected to the Legislative Assembly. She became the magistrate of Taoyuan in 1997. She thought Bill Clinton might favor Taiwan and change U.S. policy because she felt he favored Taiwan during his service as Governor of Arkansas but it did not happen. She became Vice President in 2000, the year after the Zheng Yan and her Compassion Foundation efficiently responded to the 1999 earthquake by providing medical, financial, and spiritual aid. She still hopes and believes Taiwan will get into the UN and fervently believes Taiwanese is not Chinese.

Buddhist Nuns, the “Hakka Card,” and Government Decisions

With the millions of Buddhist nuns and laywomen in Taiwan, it is difficult for the government to ignore women's and Buddhist issues. Buddhist groups in Taiwan, mostly organized by women, play important roles in healing the public after important events, such as natural catastrophes. The Buddhist laypeople heavily support these Buddhist groups financially, and women donate their time to volunteer. Almost as many women in Taiwan are as educated as their male counterparts and work and contribute financially to their families. Their voices no longer can be ignored. The volunteerism and financial contributions of the Buddhist nuns and women in Taiwan are changing the legal culture and system.

Another central issue in major national elections in Taiwan is ethnicity, and the Hakka vote is usually seen as a crucial factor in close races. Michael Hsiao describes the political atmosphere surrounding the Hakka in 2000:

To woo Hakka votes, KMT presidential hopeful Lien Chan had already promised to establish a cabinet-level Hakka Affairs Commission if elected, and DPP candidate Chen Shui-bian has promised to work hard to raise the social status of Hakka in Taiwanese society. Independent candidate James Soong has also tried to portray himself as a “friend” of Hakka. The status of Hakka as a minority and disadvantaged group has suddenly propelled them to become the favorite of all political parties.³

Some critics who hold a Minnan/Hokkien-centric stance attack Hakka as “mainlanders.” The use of the term “mainlander” is regarded by many people as derogatory because in actuality most “mainlanders” are born in Taiwan and are Taiwan citizens, not born on the mainland.

On the other hand, many “mainlanders” do not regard Hakka as a disadvantaged minority. The Hakka population in Taiwan is approximately equivalent to the

“mainlanders” population so from the “mainlanders” perspective, the Hakka should not receive special privileges because they are a minority group.

These views about the Hakka by Taiwanese and “mainlanders” reveal the distinctive consciousness of the Hakka ethnicity, even if there is an inadequate understanding or at times intended distortions of Hakka identity. The Hakka movement has also taken advantage of the rapid political and economic growth in Taiwan. In the early years in Taiwan, many Hakka were farmers, sold rice and other products, and made money to purchase more and more land to farm. As Taiwan became wealthier, land values jumped and many Hakka became extremely wealthy from their land. They not only increased their equity but they could still use the land to farm. Some Hakka developed the land by dividing large pieces of land to smaller pieces and sold them for huge profits. With cash in hand, many Hakka made further investments and became successful entrepreneurs. Most Hakka contribute to Buddhist temples to bring more merit to their families.

Many Hakka in Taiwan are among the first settlers in Taiwan. Once the outsiders, the Hakka in Taiwan are becoming insiders with special status. Politicians make different promises for the Hakka, which has encouraged the public to think about the importance of Hakka in Taiwan’s cultural and political development. As a result, politicians tend to consider the Hakka perspective and response when creating policies and agencies.

Many people in Taiwan take pride in the diversity of cultures and languages. One of the current concerns among some Hakka and others who want to preserve this diversity is to make sure the Hakka language and culture do not disappear. The Council

for Hakka Affairs was established in 2001 to promote Hakka cultural awareness and ethnic and cultural diversity in general. These activities have increased the social status of Hakka in Taiwan.

Richard Huang argues that Hakka culture is experiencing a crisis and needs to be preserved.⁴ His perspective is one that is common among older generations of Hakka. National Central University in Zhongli established the College of Hakka Studies. Similarly, National Jiao Tong University in Hsinchu and National United University in Miaoli plan to add Hakka colleges. The residents in the cities where these universities are located are overwhelmingly Hakka.

Many younger Hakka, however, do not speak the Hakka dialect and do not sense the urgency to learn. One reason for this lack of interest is the younger generation of Hakka is aware of the previous generations' political and economic struggles. The older generations often hid their Hakka identity to avoid being disadvantaged. Therefore, the Hakka language was spoken less and rarely spoken in public. These days, generally the Hakka do not hide their Hakka identity but it is also not a status that they will voluntarily disclose. Some politicians, however, claim to be Hakka in an effort to connect with the Hakka communities in Taiwan.

As reflected in Taiwan's syncretic tendencies in regards to religious practices, the Hakka and most people in Taiwan embrace cultural and ethnic diversity. They do not feel the need to be alike. In fact, what many people in Taiwan love about Taiwan is the ability for different people to live in harmony. They do not want one mainstream culture to diminish cultural diversity but rather for the cultures to coexist and enrich the Taiwan cultural experience.

The problem with having no records from Taiwan's earliest inhabitants in actuality is not a problem for the Hakka because this lacking is one that the Hakka share. Taiwan's earliest inhabitants left no records, but anthropological evidence suggests that Taiwan's indigenous peoples were Proto-Austronesians. Settlers from China came to Taiwan as early as the twelfth century CE, but large-scale immigration did not begin until the seventeenth century, when Europeans also began to arrive.

There are currently ten major indigenous tribes in the Taiwan area, comprising less than 2 percent of the population. Although most indigenous tribes have already been assimilated into Taiwan's modern culture, some continue to maintain their traditional ways of life. Taiwan's indigenous peoples are widely recognized for their contributions to the arts, particularly music, dance, and handicrafts.

The government has raised the quality of life of Taiwan's indigenous peoples and helped them integrate into the Taiwanese lifestyle. Special commissions have been established at central and local levels to handle indigenous peoples' affairs. At the same time, indigenous peoples are increasingly active in local and national politics. As of June 2001, two had served as ambassadors-at-large and national policy advisors to the president, nine held seats in the Legislative Yuan, and two were city councilors in special municipalities. Fifty-five served as city and county council members, and thirty as magistrates in rural townships with predominantly indigenous constituents.

The Revitalization of the Nuns' Order as a Necessity to Right Action

With the rise in the quality of life for the Hakka people as a whole, the Hakka Buddhist nuns in Meinong have experienced more educational opportunities in recent

years, although disparities still exist and monks continue to hold a more favorable position. More importantly, however, the public and people around the world are beginning to hear the voices of both Hakka and Buddhist nuns in Taiwan, and slowly they are gaining more recognition. The Hakka identity is a powerful intermediary for the energies of Buddhism, feminism, and social engagement. The Hakka Buddhist nuns play important roles in the historical phenomenon of the overwhelmingly large population of women in Taiwanese Buddhist monastic communities. Their efforts to revitalize the nuns' order have paved the way for women around the world to have the opportunity to choose an alternative way of life. In essence, like the healing power of pearls when they are crushed, the Buddhist nuns' lineage may have been in pieces, but the Buddhist nuns, in Taiwan especially, are healing and transforming Buddhism, improving the legal culture and system, and increasing the status of women. This renewal is a necessity to right action, which Buddhism upholds, and imperative for the survival of Buddhism.

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Chapter 5

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Chapter 6

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